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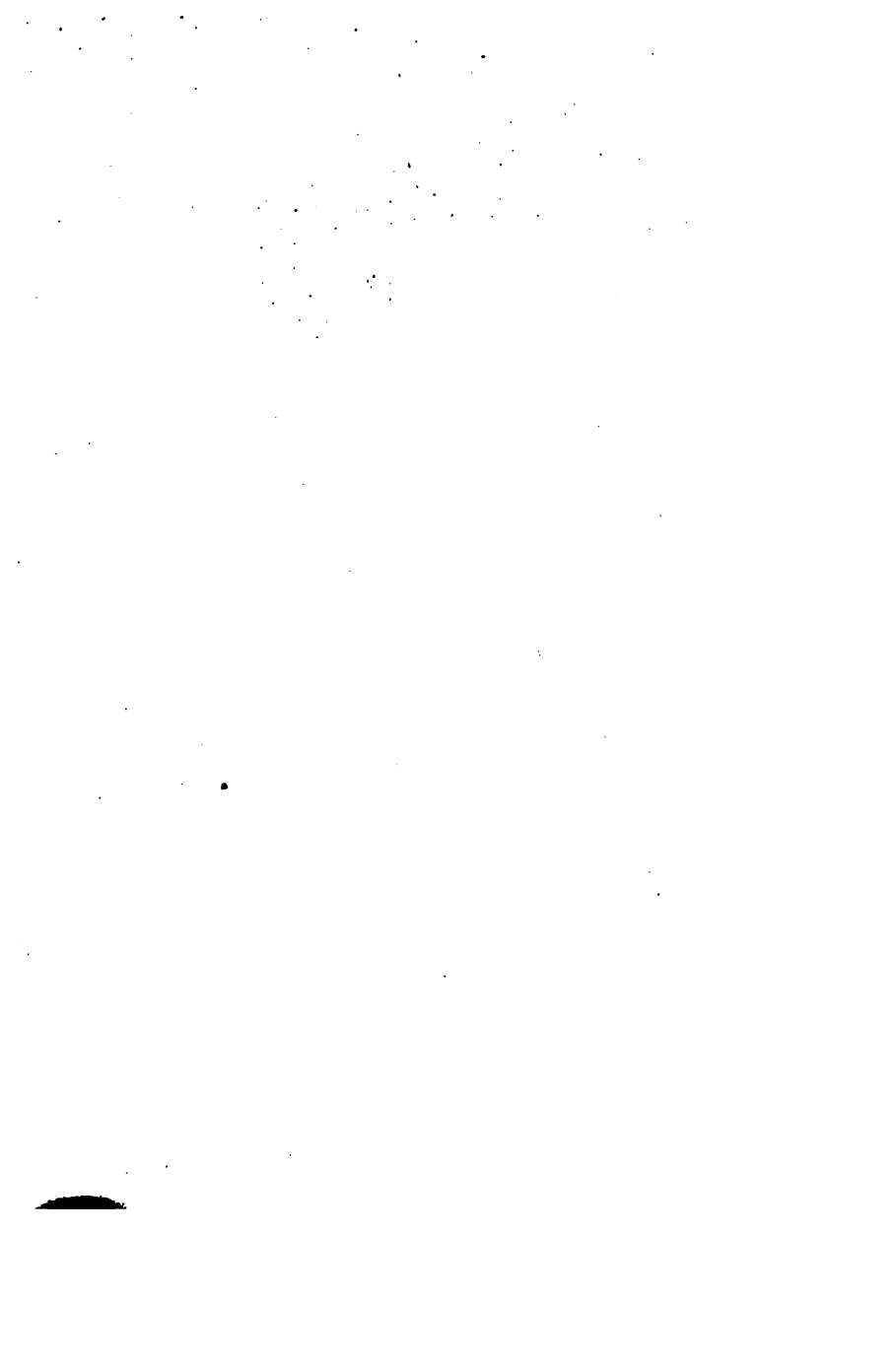


WALTER FRITH

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IN SEARCH OF QUIET

A COUNTRY JOURNAL

May—July

BY

WALTER FRITH

The result of my system will be to show that, so far from the world being a goddess in petticoats, it is rather the devil in a strait waistcoat.—COLERIDGE

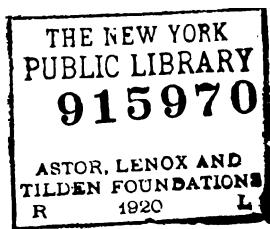


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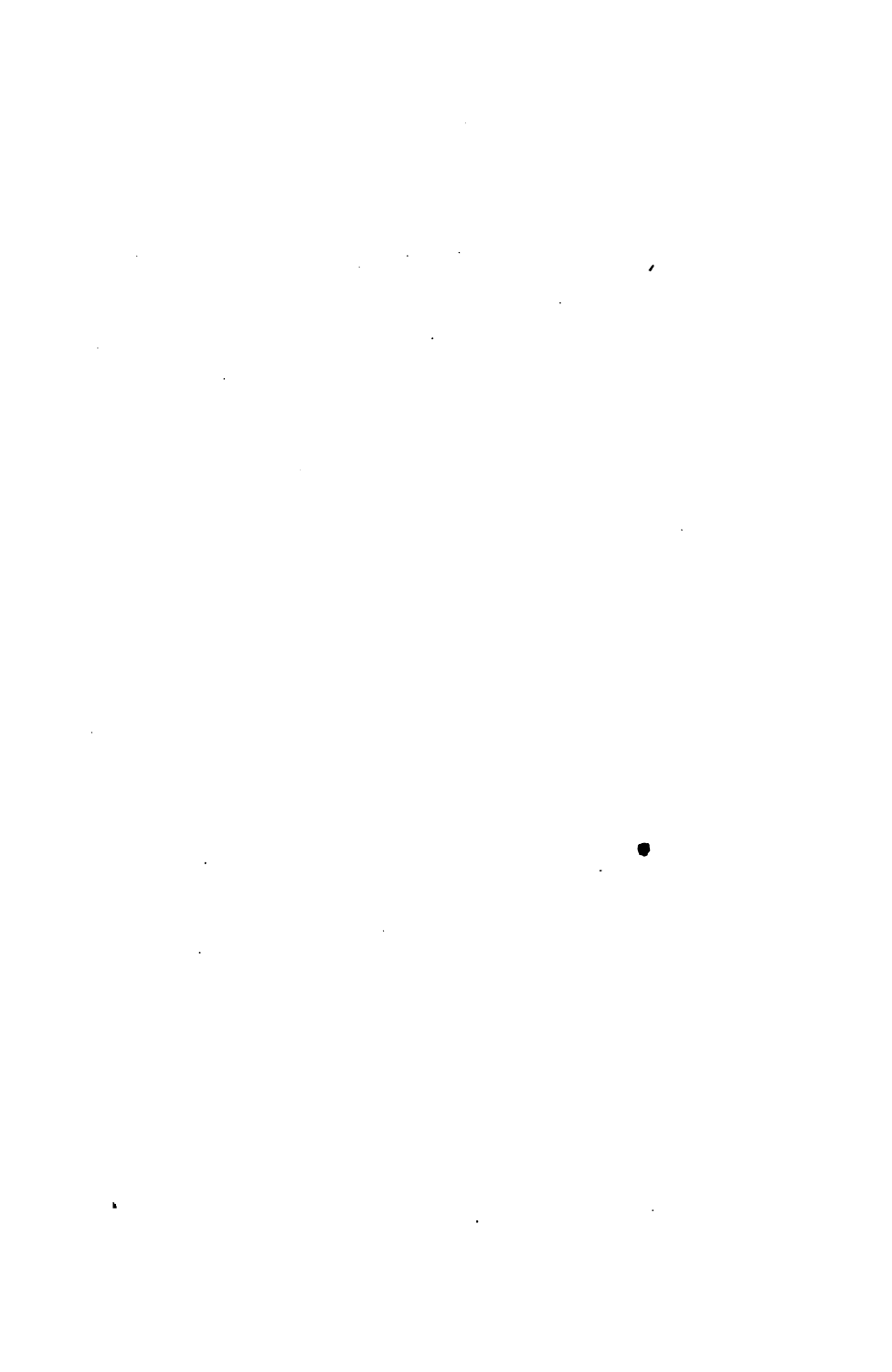


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NEW YORK
JAN 21 1896
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TO
ERSKINE GOWER
IN PROFOUND, IF SLIGHT, RECOGNITION OF
A VERY GRACIOUS AND GENEROUS SYMPATHY
THIS BOOK
Is Dedicated



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1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

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Just now, when the gracious moon threw a triangular patch there on a white bust of General Booth between two blue vases, I could see a lantern flitting yellowly outside below among the straw, and hear Mr. Chick call gruffly to Boxer to "come up out of it."

And now, in the down-stairs sitting-room, not a sound but the table creaking and the fire that falls lower in the grate, like a tired old man.

Never mind; far better than the old familiar *brouhaha* of South Kensington and all the slipshod picture-theatre jargon, and the *wow-wow* of at homes and dances. I will work at my law-book and go to bed early for a time, and make my mind clean and sweet like a North-of-Ireland farm with whitewash. Heaven knows it needs it after a winter in London.

Not a sound here, at any rate, and a text staring at me with uneven gold letters, "Fear not, for I am with thee."

And to think that this time last night I was helping a partner to some sort of a *compôte*, and the Hungarian band was slashing away at a waltz.

Truly I am glad to be out of it for a time.

This morning, when I strolled out before breakfast, I found three yokels standing in the road, staring at a broken egg. Then I met the butcher, paddling along in carpet slippers, smoking a pipe; and a boy, all neck and feet, shying stones at a pony and two calves.

There's life for you, eh?—there's movement!

I'm delighted with my farm, and especially pleased that it is four miles from a railway station. Also I

had to change on my way down, at Reading; so, until my law-book is finished, I don't fancy I shall do much running up to town.

I don't think *Weights and Measures* need take long now, if I work hard; for I've got all my authorities together, and almost all it wants is getting thoroughly into shape and rewriting. They say the only way nowadays profitably to "hug the attorneys" is to write a law-book. At any rate, I may as well have a try.

No remarkable adventures *en route* from town, but a small sort of an encounter in the railway carriage with a very disagreeable old gentleman who shared it with me. He got in at Reading and out at Warford. Mr. Chick, who met me there with the milk cart, tells me he lives in Thorpe Green, and that his name is Major Ross. So the Gentleman in search of Quiet has one enemy in the place, at all events, already.

It was the most ridiculous business; merely because I was reading with my foot up on the opposite seat—not on the cushion, mind you, but just on the wooden edge of the seat. I felt the old gentleman was fidgeting and looking at my foot, and at last he burst out to ask me if I thought that was the right thing to do, to put my foot on the seat. I believe, by-the-way, he called it a *hoof*.

I pointed out quietly it wasn't on the seat, but on the wooden edge; whereupon the old maniac grew positively offensive. Every cad, he said, put his legs up; having no property of their own, they didn't mind destroying other people's; and so on, *crescendo*.

I looked at him in amazement, and then, withdrawing my foot, went on with my book; and all the way

between Reading and Warford he kept on simmering and fuming and girding at me, steadily reading Jean Paul Richter.

Nice old gentleman, Major Ross. I trust we sha'n't often meet in Thorpe Green, or there'll be wigs on it. . . . As for my farm, it is known simply as Chick's Farm, and stands on the road a quarter of a mile outside the village—on the farther side, that is, from Warford, towards Oxford.

The household consists simply of Mr. and Mrs. Chick, his second wife.

Mr. Chick is a very shy man, much given to darting out of my way. When caught and addressed, he regards my tie, occasionally throwing furtive and alarmed glances up at my straw hat from under his bushy eyebrows.

An excellent piece of nature this farmer of mine—always busy, always cheerful, always, as he says, "earning his crust;" either with a sickle, hacking away at the rough grass on the ragged bit of lawn, where the black and white kitten plays in front of my window; or, bent double, rummaging among the potatoes; or with his great hand thwacking the cows, to bring them faster home; or carrying a world of straw on his back, crossed with broad braces like a St. Andrew. And a pipe, always a pipe, and a broken straw hat and a narrow belt of dank leather round his huge loins.

He can't write, and I don't suppose can do more than spell out the capital letters; never was in London but once, and doesn't want to go there ever again. Put him down in a copse, he says, and he knows where he is; but put him down in a large

town, and he "sort o' goes senseless." Which, by-the-way, will account (I should imagine) for the ease with which country people are bubbled by that amazing confidence trick.

A ceaseless worker, Mr. Chick, even on Sunday (much to the mournful apprehension of the clergyman of Thorpe Green, who has kindly come to call on me), and an excellent husband. Twice a week he is to be seen driving his wife into Warford to sell the butter. Prim and contented, side by side they sit in the milk cart.

Such men work down to the very last moment of life; till Death, out for a country holiday, humahaymaking, chances to look in at the farm. I knew one like him in Somersetshire. "Seems to me I don't feel s' very well," said he one morning, straightening himself, looking frightened at the unaccustomed sensation. In a quarter of an hour he was dead.

De te fabulâ! Mr. Chick; only, as I don't wish to alarm him unnecessarily, I don't propose to tell him so.

Mr. Kearsley, the clergyman—the Rev. Nathaniel Kearsley, M.A., formerly scholar of Clare, fifteenth classic, 1856—tells me Mr. Chick's great fault is an excessive love of money. "Oh, my friends, have we not all an excessive love of money!" One knows so well the absurd first-lesson voice of the average clergy.

For some years, it seems, Mr. Chick was in the habit of making *caches* about the farm, of actually driving piles of twenty and fifty sovereigns into the orchard, or tucking them in the thatch; until Mr.

Kearsley, worked on by Mrs. Chick, persuaded him to dig them all up and bank them. And when they were weighed at the bank counter it was discovered that somehow the three hundred sovereigns weighed a good deal more than they ought; due to the fact, Mr. Chick explained, that, in his adoring care, he had given each gold piece an elaborate dressing of oil.

Mrs. Chick was house-keeper and cook at the rectory for some years before Mr. Chick won her to the farm. She is a thin, small-featured, genteel, anxious sort of body, and walks about with the soft step of a person accustomed to be noiseless in gentlefolk's houses, and (I am humbly thankful to say it) she is an excellent cook.

The Rev. Mr. Kearsley, who, having a small parish and considerable means, can afford both time and the money to be a confirmed invalid (and whose constant companion, in-doors and out, is a large gray shawl), groans a good deal over her defection. Mrs. Chick says Mr. Kearsley was always very fussy about his food and the draughts—in fact, “a regular old bachelor,” than which woman can say nothing more scornful of man.

Rather a trying atmosphere altogether, that of the rectory; for it's kept as hot as a conservatory, and, in this somewhat chilly spell of weather that's come upon us, Mr. Kearsley (with his head in the shawl and his legs in a rug) lies breathing heavily on the slippery horse-hair dining-room sofa.

There, in his roomy, well-found house, he lives alone all the year; except when he goes for a month's holiday in the autumn to Torquay (which he pronounces as though it rhymed to Torbay), and when

he receives the visit of an elderly maiden sister, Miss Sophia, who comes to him in June and stays exactly three weeks.

There was a Miss Chick, by-the-way ; poor Susan, a daughter of the first wife, who died, unhappily, in the winter. This afternoon I saw Mrs. Chick kneeling over the grave, on which lay stiffly a wreath of black and white beads. She was plucking away the weeds and looking sadly down. Among the uneven mounds and sunken lichen-studded head-stones the village children were gathering buttercups.

How strange and beautiful it is, the tender fashion Nature deals even with the memorials of death—she that is all life and growth. For does she not level all the mounds, warp and break the wooden cross-pieces, draw down even the vaults into “the everlasting arms?” There was a stone in the church-yard they can well remember, a nameless stone, with only a verse from Job on it, now quite sunk and disappeared. Nature hath called the very tablet home.

The village dead all lie on the south side of the old, old, irregular church ; none on the north, for that is out of the sun. On the north, right against the church wall, the last incumbent used to grow his plum-trees. The north is bad and restless for the dead, but good for plums.

Ten o'clock strikes. Mrs. Chick draws the heavy bolt of our front door, and I will go to bed. And to think there are awnings in the squares, and linkmen, and kid gloves, and tuberoses, or orange-tawny violets, or whatever is going to be the fashionable flower.

O fumum strepitumque ! Oh, cigarettes and babble ! I am glad to be rid of them both—for a time.

CHAPTER II

A QUAKER BURIAL-GROUND—BEAN'S ROW—THE REV.
KEARSLEY AND EMMA—THE REDAN

THE more I see of my farm and Thorpe Green, the more I like both ; it's all so peaceful and sunny and flowery. The days I pass here are going to resemble each other, I can see that very clearly ; and, so far, I haven't even set eyes again on the truculent Major Ross ; for which, thanks be.

Meantime, I work as hard as I can at my law and oversmoke myself, and am very tolerably happy. A strong, sweet wind is blowing to-day, making the delicious apple blossom tremble.

This morning before lunch I found an ex-groom, in a faded M.C.C. tie, to show me the old Quaker burial-ground that lies not far from the village green, at the end of a queer retreat called the Redan. The meeting-house has become a school-room for little ladies and gentlemen, who are driven in in the morning for instruction—a nest of small sun-bonnets in governess and ralli-carts—and out again at four. The school door was open ; I could see in among the tiny scholars, buzzing like young Arabs over the Koran.

The Quaker graveyard lies at the back ; for death, a weedy, ragged place of buttercups, to be sure. Old

West, father of Benjamin, second President of the Academy, lies somewhere among them, but I couldn't find him. Forlorn and neglected, it reminded me of nothing so much as the burial-ground in a jail. At the back a door (like "the planched gate" Isabella speaks of, in the moated grange, out at St. Luke's) leads on to a narrow path that, under elms and alongside a brook, draggles down to Marling and the river. They call it still "The Quaker's Path," though 'tis years since a gray bonnet trod it. The high wall of the burial-ground is all plastered with gaudy bills of "Loisset's Circus," and "Warden's Clothing," and tattered scraps of "Vote for Peachey and the Union," or for "Flack, the agricultural laborer's friend"—scarecrows from the last general election.

I may take it that Thorpe begins where the Quaker burial-ground ends; for just round the corner of it is the post-office, with its belled door and fusty smell of candles and soap, kept by one of those tiresome, vague old creatures who leans with purple knuckles and mittens worked with gilt beads on the counter, and, to all my inquiries, is sure she don't know and can't tell, and the rest of it.

Opposite the post-office, a little retired from the road on the left, there's a slatternly double row of cottages, the *Subura* of Thorpe, where the "bud-mashes" all live; where the dirty children smear themselves with occasional bread and jam, and the women stand at the doors scratching their elbows. They have their own pump and their own code of immorals; for if ever there's drunkenness or poaching or a fight in Thorpe, the home of it is sure to be in Bean's Row; a black patch on the gay and sweet-

smelling quilt which does, perhaps, a little relieve it from insipidity—at all events to me, an arrant cockney, who finds matter for delight even in Clare Market.

Bean's Row is, I fear, a very large thorn in Mr. Kearsley's groaning side. He tries to do his duty by its denizens, no doubt; but directly he's seen coming up off the road, wrapped in his gray shawl, bang! go all the doors, and all he has left him to regard with his large moist eyes is an inexpressively filthy child thumping an old corned-beef tin.

One brand he has, at any rate, lately plucked from the burning in the person of Emma, a half-witted woman of uncertain figure, whose unsettled yet cautious eye craftily gleams beneath her tidy hair and bent straw hat.

Emma, it appears, was persuaded to marry a Bean's Row widower, no more richly gifted mentally than herself; for both of whom the leaping backward over a stick in the bar of the "Red Cow," amid much running ribaldry, was considered sufficient marriage ceremony.

Her did Mr. Kearsley, with much difficulty, persuade to come to church and complete the contract with somewhat fuller rites; and the good man even waited in patience while the bridegroom (just before pronouncing the fatal words "I will") retired behind the lecturn to shed salt tears to the memory of the spouse whom he had buried just one month before the stick-leaping episode. *Nos bons villageois!*

When I am not at work I spend my time strolling about, glorying in the blowing lilacs, the pouting laburnum, the pink and white bouquets of the May

that already begin to make the air dizzy. The spring is a little late, but it is all the more luxuriant and gay.

Let me say right here—more *Americano*—that the most attractive part of Thorpe I have discovered hitherto is an odd sort of a square that has for one of its sides the entrance to the Quaker meeting-house, now the school. You enter it under a house built over the entrance on the village side, down a flagged passage opposite the church, between the butcher's and the forge; and immediately you find yourself in an enclosure with a huge elm at the lower meeting-house end.

It's rather like a miniature Inn of Court, and is called the "Redan." The small, decent houses are all numbered—No. 1, the Redan, No. 2, and so on. It's so retired and unexpected one might live in Thorpe for years, I imagine, without being aware of its existence, unless you happened to be of my prying disposition.

Why called the Redan I can't conceive, for there's not a house in it that isn't at least twice as old as the Crimean War. It's the fashionable quarter, the Berkeley Square, of Thorpe, and on Sundays smells richly of hot roast beef.

There I have taken quite a fancy to lounging away the early afternoon, listening under the elm (which has a seat round it) to the murmurs of the school-house and the fitful piano-playing from No. 5. I say early afternoon, because I'm proud to say that at five I always go back to tea at Chick's Farm and my great law work on "Weights and Measures."

Somebody at No. 5 plays Chopin, particularly the

Nocturnes, with a weight of expression (though rather inaccurately) that bespeaks the yearning, youthful female soul. Who can that be, I wonder?

Truly, there's a charm about the Redan, a repose that endears it to me deeply. Life seems there creeper-covered and slumberous, stagnant and yet evergreen as in a backwater; like a river and like life, only without the movement and the flow. The call of the birds there is more delicately fluted, and even the pungency of the butcher-boy's whistle drops half a tone as he jingles in down the passage with his basket, cheerful and greasy.

All the little houses, with their neat steps and palings, their musk blooms, geraniums, and pots of fuchsias in the windows, seem half asleep; the tiled roofs come sloping down over the windows, as though they had been pulled there to keep the sun out of their eyes. There should be "No burdens or cries in the Inn" written up, as there is at the entrance of Clement's; though, indeed, who would wish to bring a burden or a cry into so still and drowsy an atmosphere?

The small dwellings all seem comfortably inhabited save one—one rather longer and lower than the others, near the entrance, on the left as you come in. It is one of those shallow shelters you can see right through among the trees behind; more especially once a fortnight, when the white lace curtains are sent to the wash.

I must get Mrs. Chick to tell me who lives in the Redan and the houses round the Green. I suppose some one does. At present I've scarcely seen a soul about; probably because the hours I choose for my

walks abroad are precisely those the inhabitants select for their meals at home.

Now it grows even-tide, and I must be getting home—home to my lodgings across the cowslip fields, the stiles; along the coppice and the little wood; home to my frugal dinner, my pipe, my sweet, rough bed, my pleasant waking in the morning.

The children are laughing in the village road, the ophicleide of the village band plays moodily from his cottage “God bless the Prince of Wales.”

CHAPTER III

THORPE HALL—SIR ARTHUR POYNDER—MISS FLORA—
THE OLD CHURCH—DR. MARTIN—THE CARLTONS
—THE REDAN—MAJOR ROSS—MISS HAREWOOD

I HAVE called Mrs. Chick to my aid, who, rubbing one hand gently over another, has kindly given me a deal of information.

First, about Thorpe Hall, the old house Mrs. Chick dare says I've noticed at the far end of the Green.

Thorpe Hall was the ancestral home of the Baynfords, many of whom, I must have observed, lie in the church.

Yes, I have observed them, particularly the showy colored tomb of Sir Nicholas, founder of the family, a chief-justice of James II.'s time; who, in cap and coif and pointed beard, kneels with a humility I don't suppose he ever felt in court.

The family stops short—dead short—in 1835 with Major Baynford, H.E.I.C.S., and the Rev. Walter, “for forty-three years rector of this parish.” Since then, Baynfords *mafeesh*, as they say on the Nile, and Thorpe Hall has been gradually travelling the downward path to decay. The discolored old picture on the wall behind me as I write, of a young lady in hussar uniform, comes from the Hall, when the furniture was all sold out of it years ago.

From the vivacity of her pose, the shapeliness of her hands, the dusty brightness of her roving eye, I judge her to have been the wilful wife of the Squire of Thorpe, of about 1804, who, in his hearty loyalty, no doubt raised a troop of tenant yeomanry to keep out the French, and must have made the light-hearted Louisa colonel. I can see her on inspection-day cantering in her gay uniform down the badly dressed line on the Green, and I can hear the farmer-troopers cheer and swear they will follow her across the water and smash Boney as he sits devouring children in the Tuileries.

What became of her, I wonder? Which of the still-room maids was it, for love of her old mistress, made her husband buy the picture for the farm?

Rubbing one hand gently over another, impassive Mrs. Chick is afraid she can tell me nothing.

They say the Hall was built by Inigo Jones (which, seeing the dates, I don't think it could have been, if Sir Nicholas paid for it); and now it stands, with battered griffins guarding gates that look as if they were never opened, except to carry out the tenants, feet first.

"But the paths are full of weeds, and some of the windows are boarded up, and yet some one lives there, Mrs. Chick?"

"Dear me, yes, sir; Sir Arthur Poynder and his lady." Haven't I seen them walking about?

Oh, to be sure! an old gentleman with a clipped white mustache and a youthful figure; an old lady, veiled, an indistinguishable pile of sombre cloaks and petticoats, like a lady in Stamboul—who walk

the lanes together, some distance apart, silent and absorbed.

"That is Sir Arthur and his lady," says Mrs. Chick. An impoverished baronet of ancient Worcestershire family, who is glad to get Thorpe Hall for £30 a year, and live an absolutely retired life in part of it. Lady Poynder is a Greek, from the island of Corfu, which will account for her resemblance to an ancient, dim Light of the Harem. They have one son, John, a fine young gentleman, at present quartered with his regiment somewhere in Yorkshire, Mrs. Chick believes.

Forbidding and inhospitable as the old Hall looks now, it was not always so, however, even in Mrs. Chick's memory ; for she can just recall festal days when Mr. Adams and his sister, Miss Flora, lived there and saw a great deal of company. They used to give balls and dinner-parties, and young gentlemen from Oxford came over to dance and stay the night.

Now Mr. Adams lies in the church under a kindly epitaph, while Miss Flora still lives, a very old lady, at Torquay.

For nineteen years—positively, nineteen years!—Miss Flora was engaged to marry one Peacock, a well-to-do brewer at Warford. The marriage was so long delayed owing to the dutiful impossibility the good girl felt of leaving her bachelor brother. But, alas for Peacock! when her brother did at last die, and the faithful lover drove over in his gig to claim the fulfilment of the ancient promise, coy Flora found another impossibility—she didn't care for him sufficiently!—and the wretched Peacock had to drive home again in his gig, alone.

So much for Thorpe Hall, where now Sir Arthur amuses himself wood-carving and writing semi-learned papers on British tumuli, and in tracing the old pack-saddle path that used to cross the country from the Norfolk coast.

The old church, among whose tumbled graves lies poor Susan Chick, stands alone, right in the middle of the village. It has an uneven, broken-backed look, like a weary old lizard petrified in its effort to creep down to the water-side. The vane on the spire, the only new thing about the edifice, was put up seventy years ago. There's an old man still living in Bean's Row who rode astride of it before they took down the scaffolding.

Inside age and decay, and church-wardens' handicraft everywhere.

It's just an ancient church, in short, untouched by the Tractarian movement, or Ritualism, or any modern form of religious thought whatsoever; just as one sometimes goes into a London house, Russell Square way, left absolutely high and dry above the picturesque damp of æstheticism.

Even the royal arms that hang over the door still carry the lilies of France, and are still charged with the Hanoverian shield of pretence.

But though halls be ancient and churches in decay, life in its phases as we know it of to-day will not be denied. Sir Arthur's may be a strange figure, but I'll be bound her ladyship takes in a society paper; he may look like the old baronet out of a Christmas annual, but I doubt not if ever I come to know him (not that I in the very least want to) I shall find him in touch somewhere with modernity.

There are no old-fashioned people left, unless it be some few unpleasant children.

And, after all, isn't it only right it should be so? for, though "up to date" and "*dans le mouvement*" are detestable phrases, on the other hand you can't ignore your century, you mustn't be "a bastard to the time," as Philip says in "King John."

Meantime, Mrs. Chick goes on. In the house next Mr. Kearsley's rectory, covered just now with purple bunches of wistaria, and with a rickety little cupola belfry on the top, lives Dr. Martin, the young doctor with the tight, trim red whiskers I have seen driving about in a gig. His grandmother Martin, a wonderfully vigorous old lady of eighty-three, lives there with him. The doctor is engaged to be married to Miss Constance Ryle, daughter of an Indian colonel, who rides a tricycle in and about Bayswater. They have been engaged some years, says Mrs. Chick, and are to be married at the beginning of the autumn. Miss Ryle generally comes down for a few weeks in the summer; a very nice young lady, and a rare hand at lawn-tennis.

Across the Green, where the geese are mostly to be found delving and hissing over a very bad cricket pitch, there's a solid, comfortable dwelling—a farm, owned by the Westons. Mrs. Chick has nothing more to say about them than that they are comfortably off, and quiet, respectable people. Just now they are in deep mourning, and attend church choking in all that overwhelming wealth of crape the lower middle-class revel in when they lose an aunt who leaves them a bit of money.

Next the Westons' stands a very pleasant, long,

low cottage, with white posts and sticky black chains in front. Mr. and Mrs. Carlton live there, a young married couple with one baby boy. Mr. Carlton is a poet, according to Mrs. Chick; though, to be sure, she can't give me the titles of any songs he may have sung.

Mrs. Carlton was the daughter of the rector of Burford, near Oxford; her father used to take pupils for the University. Mr. Carlton was a pupil there when he fell in love with Miss Rosemary, and married her soon after taking his degree. She's a tall young lady with a nice face; perhaps I've seen her on the Green in the afternoons with the perambulator?

Indeed I have, Mrs. Chick; a girl of two or three and twenty, with the most charming, gentle, serious, what I may call stained-glass expression, and beautiful braided masses of hair, something between red and gold. Mrs. Chick laughs, and describes the husband as a short young gentleman with a mustache, who is always smoking a pipe. They have a nice little fortune, and never leave Thorpe; but Mr. Carlton goes up to town occasionally to see his publisher. A poet with a publisher? See what it is to have a nice little fortune!

And the Redan—what about the Redan and No. 5, where the piano playing comes from? Mrs. Chick tells me Mrs. Pearce and Miss Harewood live at No. 5. They have been lodging there since the early spring, have been away up in London, and not long come back again. Miss Harewood is an orphan of nineteen or twenty, and Mrs. Pearce, who looks after her, is a distant elderly relative of her mother's.

Miss Fanny Harewood is very bright and pretty,

says Mrs. Chick; so hers must be the yearning female soul that passes into the Nocturnes. It can scarcely be Mrs. Pearce's, who is sixty, revels in the *Queen* a fortnight old, and is of extremely uncertain temper; of which the butcher, who is continually being charged with selling her Australian meat, is ready to take oath in any county court in the kingdom.

Yesterday afternoon, by-the-way, I saw the occupant of No. 1, the shallow dwelling at the entrance, coming down the steps and through the doll's-house gate; and who should it turn out to be but the railway-carriage old gentleman who objected so monstrosously to my *hoof*. He's a rather distinguished-looking, thin, tall old man, with a white mustache and imperial, and an expression of somewhat savage defiance. I felt quite relieved that he didn't see me, the old tiger.

Mrs. Chick says yes, that's Major Ross, a very strange gentleman. He never speaks to any one (oh, doesn't he, though!), employs no servant, except a daily charwoman, who also cooks; allows no one else inside the house, and has even the milk left at the door. He is a widower with one son, a boy at school at Mr. Ferrier's select establishment, Heath Hill, about three miles away.

Once only has he seemed conscious of any other existence in Thorpe than his own, when Miss Harewood, coming from church and caught in the rain, the old gentleman ran home and fetched an umbrella for her to the porch.

He has been living in the place a month, observes Mrs. Chick, and so far hasn't passed the time of day

to a soul; unless to Ben, the assistant at the forge, and that only because he's an old soldier. The result of all which is that Bean's Row have decided he's a coiner in retreat, and on fine nights are much given to watching his back windows.

Some disappointment there, I suppose, which has warped a once fine nature, or some sorrow that has broken him to silence. Perhaps his wife ran away from him, or he has received some such public, unforgivable blow to his pride.

But mercy on us, what folly! for if we were all to let our sorrows and disappointments chase us into solitude, this bright world of ours would be nothing but one melancholy succession of isolated wigwams.

CHAPTER IV

DR. MARTIN — A CONSULTATION — AN INVITATION—
MISS FANNY HAREWOOD—A LITERARY CHARACTER
—MAJOR ROSS ON GUARD

Not feeling 's' very well this morning,' nor for some mornings past, I sent round my compliments to Dr. Martin, and begged him to look in upon me, the gentleman staying at Chick's farm, during the day.

In upon me, accordingly, Dr. Martin looked about half-past ten, clapping his thick yellow driving-gloves together, and regarding me not unkindly from under his shrewd, russet eyebrows. He wore a short covert-coat (the tails of a black cutaway showing below it) and a large home-made button-hole of geranium and verbena.

As a rule, I confess I don't much joy in the society of doctors, they are so ultra-professional. If you tell them an amusing story, you can see by the eye they're not listening, but are actively engaged in casting up your diagnosis.

"Ah, my boy!" the eye says quite plainly, "you may laugh and talk and pretend to enjoy life, but you're gradually developing the worst symptoms of trichinosis"—or whatever your latent complaint may be—"I ever saw in my life."

That's their social attitude towards you, and, I take it, it's offensive. No other professional men do it. If I sit next a gentleman after dinner, I don't express, by the lurking gloom of my glance, that I see hidden in him the fraudulent trustee. No; I am a mere *convive joyeux*! unless I happen to know he's a solicitor, when I try to impress him with the sense of the soundness of my judgment, and the fact that I am extremely fatigued with the long hours I have been spending in court.

The difficulty with Dr. Martin was to get him to talk medicine at all. It was only by persistence I brought him even to listen to my symptoms, as may be gathered from the following conversation:

"Well, I heard you were here."

"Yes, doctor; I—"

"Pretty comfortable?"

"Oh yes, thank you. I—"

"Nice place, Thorpe, eh?"

"Very; but I—"

"I say, what made you come by that slow train? If you'd come by the 4.23 you wouldn't have had to change."

"Yes, I know. But I was going to tell you—"

"My word, you've got a lot of papers! Writing a novel?"

"No; it's a law-book."

"There's a chap staying in the Redan who's writing a novel; that's why I asked. You're a barrister, ain't you?"

"Yes; and I—"

"Do you know a man at the bar called Ferrier?"

"No."

"He does pretty well, I believe. He's at the Old Bailey. His brother keeps a school near here. Where are you?"

"Common-law bar. And—"

"I say, you've got a nice show of pipes. What's your 'baccy'?"

"Craven mixture. Try some?"

"Well, half a pipe. I'm looking out for a new mixture."

Then does Dr. Martin proceed to unbutton his covert-coat and fill one of my spare pipes, while I begin to tell him in detail of my morning giddiness.

To which the doctor, absolutely inattentive and slightly smiling—

"How do you get on with old Chick? He's a rum un, ain't he?"

So I knew that if ever I were to be prescribed for it must be at the doctor's chosen moment, and we fell to talking of other things. Occasionally he got up to look out of my little sliding window, to see that his horse was being properly walked up and down by the youth in the hat brushed the wrong way (with a little bit of loose gold cord hanging round it) and the enormous black overcoat—his servant.

At last, as I felt I was being trifled with and the morning going, when he asked me if I played cricket and would play in a match on Saturday week, I replied tartly that I would if I didn't die in the meantime. Dr. Martin laughed, and, going to the door, shouted to Mrs. Chick to bring him a glass of water. Then he advanced on me, unscrewing a little thermometer, and asked if I could bowl.

"I ain't been smoking," he laughed to Mrs. Chick;

"it's this bad man. He smokes too much, that's what's the matter with him." And before I could deny it, he had clapped the thermometer under my tongue and told me to keep my mouth shut.

According to Dr. Martin, all that Thorpe wants to make it an earthly paradise is a good fast bowler. We are going to play Watterley Parva on Saturday week, and if between now and then a good fast bowler doesn't make his appearance, "we shall be beat again for a moral." The doctor's fresh and cheerful visage clouds over at the thought, as though the whole of Bean's Row were down with the cholera. He stands at the little window, with his hands behind him, looking gloomily out, and repeating to himself, in melancholy tones, "We shall be beat again for a moral."

Then he gives a loud sigh, relieves me of the thermometer, tells me I have no fever, and am only a little bilious; claps his riding gloves together again, and with the renewed injunction that I am not to smoke so much, dislocates my right arm and is gone. As he passes my window he flicks it with the whip and shouts, "Nine o'clock!"

Now, how dare he break in upon my thoughtful, retired life with his obstreperous medical-student ways? What's the good of my selecting Thorpe Green and its quiet, if I am to be dragged into cricket-matches and introductions to all the leading inhabitants? I meant to be a mere *flâneur*, to wander about the place with a superior, highly sarcastic London smile—"You queer country people, what odd lives you lead! how amusing it is to watch you!"—and here he's actually made me promise to go in and

smoke with him to-night, and play tennis and cricket, and get to know all the people.

He had me at a disadvantage of course, with his thermometer in my mouth; otherwise I should have explained that I was happier left alone, and had enough going out in London.

And yet I don't know. I believe a little mild village companionship will do me good. Sometimes, in the early afternoons, I feel wofully bored and depressed.

By-the-way, I have seen Miss Fanny Harewood. She is really very slim and bright and pretty.

I was sitting under the elm in the Redan, reading *Elective Affinities*, a work I may mention that, in my judgment, bristles with moral priggishness, when out of No. 5 she tripped. Tripped is the word, she walked so lightly.

Now at No. 13, opposite, a young man was sitting (the doctor's novelist, I presume) writing at the window. He had looked up at me half an hour before when I strolled in, and between us there passed that look of half-recognition when two gentlemen seem to know each other by sight. We have both seen each other in the Temple, I suppose; at any rate, I connect him somehow with Hare Court, though I haven't an idea what his name may be.

Odd, not to say rather remarkable, looking young man. He has a quantity of brown hair, and a curious heavy, white face under it. The eyes are rather deep set, the nose is straight (of the Greek-affected description), and he wears a short, thick mustache. He's a clumsy-looking fellow, so much of him as I could see; altogether, I should say a gentleman

about whom there was a good deal more smoke than fire. On his forefinger, the last place one cares to see it, I noticed a heavy seal ring.

"*Bon soir, voisine !*" he called to Miss Harewood, as she closed her front gate. "*Bon soir, voisin !*" she called back, laughing, in a very sweet, fresh voice.

"Gracious mercy !" I said to myself, "this is affectations. Why do they speak to each other in French ?"

Then, "Where are you going ?" he asked, putting his white face out of the window. "Choir practice," she answered, waving her hand, and tripped away down the flagged entry.

The young man looked out after her (his name, by-the-way, I find is Banquier), and then I felt he had a good long look at me. My face was turned the other way, and I saw that the lace curtains at Major Ross's windows were moved.

So I went on reading my book.

"Sir," called the young man after a pause, "may I ask you if you can tell me the time ?"

"It's a quarter to five," I answered, politely.

"I'm much obliged to you," he replied, and, pulling in his big head, went on with his writing.

Somehow, I had the instinct he didn't in the least want to know the time, but wanted to hear whether I had the voice of a gentleman. Pure literary curiosity.

As a few moments later I turned to go home to tea, Major Ross came out and down his little steps. It was the first time we had met face to face since our encounter ; he glared at me with a fixed, fierce sort of "what the devil are *you* doing here ?" look.

Then he glared across at No. 13, peaceably writing and blowing a stupendous cloud of cigarette smoke.

He reminded me of a savage old colonel just about to administer a good wiggling to a couple of subalterns. I felt inclined to bow my head meekly, and say, "Please, sir, it wasn't me; it was the other boy." As I went down the entry I heard him slam his little gate, and his sharp tread coming after me over the flagged stones.

"Now, is he going to renew the railway war?" said I to myself, "or does he want to see whether I'm going to follow the young lady into the church? Bitter old watch-dog, what's it matter to him?"

However, I turned homeward to the left, across the Green and past the forge, to tea and a good spell at *Weights and Measures* unmolested.

The major remained standing at the mouth of the entry. I felt his eyes burning into the small of my back.

CHAPTER V

MRS. CHICK AND I—OLD MRS. MARTIN AT HOME—HER
VIEWS OF THORPE FOLK—VEGETARIANS—A CRICK-
ET ENTHUSIAST

Mrs. CHICK and I have had quite a little scene. She came in yesterday after tea in a state more nearly approaching agitation than I have yet discovered in her. She informed me she couldn't go on with it, that it was wearing her, that she was obliged to give it up. She was quite petulant and cross.

"What is that, Mrs. Chick?" I asked, my heart beginning to beat, for anything sets your heart beating on a farm.

"Why, the food, sir, the getting things in. I'm afraid I don't give satisfaction."

"Why, Mrs. Chick," I replied, in astonishment, "I've never been so well looked after, so comfortable, so thoroughly satisfied in all my life. Do I cause you so much trouble?"

"Well, sir, the fresh fish worries me," she confessed.

"Anything else?"

"No, sir, it's the fish, principally."

You see, there's a man comes round with a barrow on Saturdays laden with extremely pale and sodden fish-mongers' refuse, which forms the chief de-

light of Bean's Row. At first Mrs. Chick tried to serve my table with that. At my protest, however she procured it from Warford when she goes in to sell her butter there. Once or twice, after ordering, she's forgotten to call for it, and has returned in a state bordering on distraction. Hence these fears. Added to which, I'm afraid I've been careless in not praising her cooking quite so much as it really deserves. But she was quite firm, she couldn't go on with it. Breakfast she could always manage, and occasionally lunch, but not dinner. I must really make other arrangements for my dinner.

I kept calm, reproachfully sorrowful; above all, conciliatory. Yet all I could get from her was that she would see what could be done, and talk it over with Mr. Chick.

"And if any more money is wanted, Mrs. Chick," I ventured.

No, it was not a question of money, Mrs. Chick gave me rather crossly to understand; it was a question of mental wear and tear.

Now all this shows how careful you should be in giving people the appreciation that is their due. Praise is the wine of life, especially to a cook, and Mrs. Chick was suffering from the teetotaler's irritability and anæmia.

But I fancied I was safe with Mr. Chick. Fond of money as the good man is, I felt I could safely trust him not to let the dinner fund go out of the house.

And, sure enough, when I went out for my evening stroll, there was Mr. Chick, striding towards me over the cabbages, actually beginning a conversation.

He has a habit of respectfully holding his forefinger to the brim of his tattered straw hat while he talks; at the end of the sentence he straightens his arm out, brings it back again before he begins another. Working his arm like a semaphore, he respectfully delivered himself as follows:

The woman (as he always calls his wife) was a little upset; a gentleman like myself, with all I had in my head (oh, the flatterer!), knew what women were—full of fancies and nonsense when there was nothing at all to trouble themselves over. The woman had talked it over with him, and, if I pleased, was willing to keep to the old arrangement. All the woman had been afraid of was that I wasn't pleased with her; and Mr. Chick regarded me with palpitating interest, his forefinger glued to his brim till I should be pleased to answer him.

I nodded, *grand seigneur* that I am, and said I was glad everything had come right. Whereupon, for fear I should change my mind and give notice of leaving, Mr. Chick left me hastily, saluting as he went, calling out, "Yes, sir!—thank you, sir!—women are like that, ain't they, sir?—you know that, sir!" and instantly resumed his work, bent double, rummaging among the cabbages; nor has he paid me the slightest attention since.

As for Mrs. Chick, reaction from her depression brought her bustling in at dinner-time with all the assumed gayety and go of a stage servant; and as for me, I break out into raptures even over her toast. Neither of us will be able to keep it up, that's one comfort, but I don't think there'll be another scene.

Really, Major Ross's attentions to me are growing

almost too pointed. What can it matter to him that, most afternoons, I sit quietly reading in the Redan? I don't stare in at his window, nor rattle a stick along Miss Harewood's palings; I simply maunder into the square with my book and a rug, and as often as not I don't read more than a page or two, but just lie back and look up at the lovely May sky through the mosaic canopy of the new leaves.

The peace of it all, the balm to me and my maculate London soul! Only the breeze in the great elm, as though the little elves there were clapping their green and slender hands, the most sensitive and delicate leaf applause.

No. 13 doesn't object to me. He writes and smokes and pays me no sort of attention whatever, doesn't even look up at me as I come in down the passage. Then why on earth should Major Ross this afternoon—

But first, perhaps, I should record the evening I spent at the doctor's, as it comes first in order of time.

My dinner-hour is rather irregular, much to Mrs. Chick's grief, but last night I sat down punctually at eight, so as to get round to the doctor's soon after nine.

When I got there (the little house next the rectory, with the wistaria and the rickety cupola belfry) a neat little maid opened the door. There was a step down into the small, dark hall, and I was confronted by the odd, penetrating odor of quince jam.

The little maid ushered me straight into the drawing-room, where I found the doctor on his knees oiling a cricket-bat over the Oxford *Times* spread on the hearth-rug. He declared his hands too oily

to offer me, but he didn't mind occasionally setting his grandmamma's immense cap straight with them.

I was presented, as the gentleman staying at Chick's farm, to the old lady sitting wrapped up in a shawl by the lamp. She bowed, and round swung the cap, to be immediately set straight by her dutiful grandson's oily hands.

I may mention it isn't really (so far as I could judge) a cap at all; it's something between the turban of the Bath chaperon of 1830 and what I imagine the calash to have been. It makes no pretence to a fit, but at the least movement swings with grave impartiality over one ear or the other. My impression was, the old lady is entirely bald, and, the head being smooth, the erection has nothing for its wires to grip. I fancy, too, it was put on to do me honor; that if I hadn't been there, the old lady would have sat in some sort of scratch front, or with a bare poll like a Queen Anne poet.

Mrs. Martin is a handsome old woman, with large, masculine features (not at all unlike the late Lord Cairns, Chancellor) and a deep, vibrating voice. Mrs. Chick tells me she's a lady of very good old county family, allied to many of the Yorkshire nobility, and was considered to have very much come down in the world when she married the doctor's grandfather, a clergyman in Kent.

On learning I had come to Thorpe to work, and proposed to stay some time (at any rate, till the book is done) she remarked, in the Big Ben tones of Cairns, C., beginning a judgment in the House of Lords, "Well, you'll find us a queer lot, as the devil said of the Ten Commandments!"

One would think I had invented that, but those are positively the very words the old lady used. They put me at my ease at once, and I sat talking to her till she went off to bed a little before ten.

Her grandson oiled his bats all the while with a stump, smoking a pipe with a peculiar gurgling noise. Occasionally he came and put the turban-calash straight; sometimes Mrs. Martin did it for herself with her large-knuckled hands. Once she startled me by swearing at it audibly. "Damn this cap!" she grumbled. The doctor coughed till I thought he would choke.

I don't know whether I chanced on a bad evening, but for some little time Mrs. Martin did little else but vent her spleen on the inmates of Chick's farm and Thorpe folk generally, for most of whom she appears to have a cordial distaste. It appears they rent a field from Mr. Chick for pasturage for the doctor's horse, and, under cover of the night, Mr. Chick steals his cows in and out of it. So Mr. Chick is a barefaced thief, that's what he is. As for Mrs. Chick, she was well enough off at the rectory with that *malade imaginaire*, Mr. Kearsley, who would have been sure to have left her a bit of money on his death; what on earth did she want to take up with Chick for, then, who's half-witted and a miser? And so on.

Then the old lady turned her polite attention to me, and desired to be informed of the work I was engaged on. She was glad to hear it wasn't a novel. She'd read every novel that had ever been written (French, English, and German), and knew exactly what it was all going to be about after the first ten pages.

I ventured timidly to observe that novels would be better worth reading if only they were written by people who knew something about life.

"That's about it!" growled the old lady. "The idiots think life's all love. Now, I'm eighty-three, and I know there's very little of it, and that what goes by the name is almost invariably selfishness. No, there's not much love, but there's plenty of make-believe, as Dickens's Marchioness said." With a scornful twitch of her large nose, she went on: "Bob tells me there's a young man staying in the Redan who's writing a novel. I suppose he's doing it to make himself interesting to that pretty Fanny What'sername he's flirting with so outrageously."

Dr. Martin interposed, and said Mr. Banquier had written a novel before, and one which had had considerable success.

"What's the name of it?" asked his grandmother, turning towards him, while the cap gave a huge lurch, like an Atlantic liner in a heavy swell.

"*Moonflowers.*"

"O Lord, yes! I remember, I read it," the old lady snorted, contemptuously; "one of the new miserable sort, what I call the white-faced novel. But, bless your soul, I don't read 'em much now. When a famous novel appears now, I just sit tight and let it blow over, as old Lord Dudley used to say. It always does in six months, especially if a woman writes it. Why, there was only one *man* who could write a novel, and that was Thackeray. I knew Thackeray. He was a giant. Ah, there's no blowing over there! That's a figure, young gentleman, that looms greater every day."

The doctor winked at me over the cap, as much as to say Thackeray was his grandmother's battle-horse, and I must bear with its pacing and curvetting. But, no, the old lady went off into a long, low chuckle instead, and to her grandson bending over her, and demanding in trumpet tones of affection (for the old lady is very deaf), "What's up now, missus?" answered, "I was thinking of those fools of women at Laurel Lodge."

"Oh, the vegetarians."

"Ah! Has he seen 'em?"

"Have you seen them?" the doctor asked me: "Miss Barth and Mrs. Shine—tall, thin, middle-aged females."

"They've got a brother," chuckled Mrs. Martin, without giving me time to answer—"at least, one of 'em has, 'cause they ain't sisters. He's a bigger fool than either of 'em, to look at. He's a fruit merchant in Thames Street. They live on figs and dried-apples and canary-seed; they do, upon my word! The brother supplies 'em by the sackful. Oh, dear! oh, dear! What precious fools there are in the world!"

"Luckily for us!" the doctor said. "Do you know that the new Mrs. Peacock wrote to me from Warford yesterday to say she'd five hundred a year of her own, and to ask how much of it I thought she ought to spend in medicine?"

"All of it, of course!" cried Mrs. Martin, vehemently. "It's not a penny too much. Now I'll tell you something," she went on, putting one of her large, square fingers on my sleeve. "The other day those two lunatic women informed me, quite seri-

ously, they thought we ought all to return to the time when people lived on grains and milk. So I said I hoped they'd adopt the proper costume of the period at the same time. 'What was that?' says Mrs. Shine, quite interested. She belongs to some insane dress-reform association or other. 'Well,' I said, 'if you go backward in your food, you may as well be consistent and go backward in your dress too. You should paint yourselves blue, and wear wolf-skins, if you can get 'em. Oh, and give up Laurel Lodge'—not that that pokey, damp hole's much to deny themselves—'and live in a cave with flint instruments.'” And the old lady rubbed her nose with hooked forefinger and chuckled delightedly.

“I had a passage with them on Tuesday,” pursued the doctor. “You must know they've adopted a child out of Bean's Row, and are bringing it up on the newest principles.”

“The newest principles being the old ones we've most of us had the sense to discard!” chimed in his grandmamma. “Would you believe it? every other Saturday the creature has a holiday to go and play with its youthful relatives, and regularly she brings back some new complaint or other from that sweet Bean's Row. What's she got now?”

“Measles; and last Tuesday I ordered her beef-tea.”

“O Lord!” ejaculated the old lady, “animal food! That won't do.”

“I bribed the cook to make it, and as I was smuggling it up-stairs I ran against Miss Barth. ‘What have you got there, may I ask?’ says she, sniffing suspiciously. You should have seen her face when

I told her. We'd a regular fight over it on the stairs, but I managed to carry it through. I think I frightened her by talking about neglect of proper remedies and manslaughter."

"If you met those two women in a book you'd say they were exaggerations," said the old lady, gathering her shawl and her skirts about her preparatory to going off to bed, "and there they are walking about the village."

"Oh, they're mad," observed the doctor, cheerfully, "as mad as March hares."

"They say we're all mad. What's your particular form of insanity, may I inquire?" Mrs. Martin asked, fixing me with her shrewd old eyes.

"He smokes too much!" roared the doctor.

The little maid, who had come to assist her mistress up-stairs, was staring at me with round, frightened eyes, as if she expected me to treat them to an exhibition of lunacy on the spot.

"What are you glaring at, Emma?" cried Mrs. Martin; "my word!"

The little maid said "No, m'm," tremulously, and, after the old lady had nodded to me and taken her grandson's arm, followed up-stairs, carrying the pillow and shawl.

"He seems a gentleman," I heard Mrs. Martin remark outside on the stairs, "but he looks as if he wants feeding up."

Genial, outspoken old lady! You see what it is to come of a good old county family, and be related to the Yorkshire nobility. It gives you a sort of seigneurial rights.

When the doctor returned, I sat with him some

little time in his study talking cricket. If my particular craze is tobacco (which I entirely deny), his is most certainly cricket. His sole estimate of character appears to be whether a man is a good or bad bat; and the greatest condemnation he can mete out to an individual is, that he is a most indifferent field. For that he can find no sort of excuse.

I tried to get something out of him about Mr. Banquier, of the Redan, but all he would say was that he had "the rottenest stroke on the leg-side I ever saw in my life. Fancies himself, too, and can't hold a catch to save his blessed soul. You never saw such an all-round indifferent performer."

His notion of happiness, he tells me, is a long day at Lord's, at a first-rate county match; and when he dies he says he wants to be buried there under the turf, right in the middle of the best wicket. He looked at me with a touching wistfulness when he learned I was a member of the M.C.C., and I believe I have made a friend of him for life by promising him my card, which will secure him members' seats at all but two or three of the great matches.

Well, if we are all mad, it's just as well our madness should take a harmless, healthy form.

There's something pleasant and clean about the young man, and about the house too, for all its penetrating odors of quince. I'm glad I sent for him, and glad I went round to spend the evening. I generally find I am when it's over, however much I may dislike the idea of going anywhere at first.

To be sure, I dare say I should have got through my little troubles of *malaise* without professional assistance but for the knowledge that the doctor was

engaged to be married. I wanted to become his patient, so that he might have more to spend on his wedding-trip. I like to play the part of a cheap Providence to young lovers.

As I walked home, globes of fire hung over me in the dusky, palpitating night, and all low and yellow the sickle moon. The night birds called to each other, the road was white, and far down it gleamed the lamp of my little sitting-room on the farm.

CHAPTER VI

MAJOR ROSS—ANOTHER ENCOUNTER—BEN THE PAINTER—MRS. PEARCE—THE MAJOR VISITS ME—AND I VISIT HIM—THE TRAMP

As for Major Ross, the malevolent Major Ross, this is what happened :

I was sitting in the Redan, reading a little, thinking a little, enjoying myself a good deal ; No. 5 was silent—I believe they had gone over to the Hall to tea—and No. 13 was writing away with a scratchy quill pen, when the major suddenly presented himself before me, his hands behind his back, regarding me with sour displeasure.

I wasn't so sure but that we were going to have a renewal of the scene in the railway carriage, so I treated him to a silly-serious smile by way of conciliation ; at which he frowned darkly, and snapped out, " Fine day, sir."

" Yes," I said, rather startled. It was a very fine day.

" May I ask what you are reading ?"

" Certainly." I was reading *Elective Affinities*.

" By—"

" By Goethe ; the author of *Faust*," I added, considerably, as I knew military gentlemen are not much given to books.

No. 13's quill pen stopped scratching. He was evidently listening to our conversation.

"I am obliged to you," answered the major, "I was perfectly aware that Gerty was the author of *Faust*. The present generation are not the sole depositaries of learning," he added, with a malignant smile.

He sat beside me, and, saying "Allow me," took the book from my hands. I fancy he calculated on finding my name on the title-page, to which he at once turned; but as it was a London library book his curiosity was balked. He returned it to me immediately, and remarked, "I have seen you sitting here before."

"Yes," I replied, "it was a favorite spot of mine."

"Humph!" growled the major, and returned his glasses with a click inside his waistcoat. Then he half turned impatiently towards No. 13, as much as to say, "Go on scribbling, confound you, and don't listen to us."

Mr. Banquier took the hint, and the quill began to scratch again.

The major resumed: "You are apparently not aware, sir, that this seat was made, and by rights is reserved, for residents in the Redan."

"I was not aware of it," I answered, and (with rather needless impertinence) looked up into the tree to see if there were a notice there to that effect.

"There are plenty of seats on the common, or green, or whatever they choose to call it," said the major, testily.

"But possibly," I gravely replied, "they were made and are reserved for the residents *there*?"

"Possibly. Still you are at liberty to use them until one of the residents wants the seat."

"And here, too, I imagine. There is room for at least six persons."

The major glared at me, and his eye said as plainly as eye could, "You impudent jackanapes! I should like to wring your neck."

Mr. Banquier stopped writing; he clearly hoped there was going to be a row.

I showed an inclination to resume reading, whereupon Major Ross went on with increased ill-temper: "Doesn't it occur to you, sir, that by constantly coming here you may be keeping ladies away from a seat to which they have a right and you have none?"

"Oh, ho!" thought I to myself, "that's it, is it? I wonder which he admires most, Miss Fanny Harewood or Mrs. Pearce."

But I said out loud, "I should be sorry to keep ladies away from anything to which they have a mind; and if, when they come, I in any way incommoded them, I shall be perfectly ready to retire."

Perhaps my language was not altogether so choice as I report it, but the sense of my actual little speech was the same.

The major rose, and, looking at me fixedly, said, "Then, sir, I have only to say this: If, after what I have told you, I again find you sitting here, I shall be reluctantly driven to the conclusion that you are not a gentleman."

"Major Ross," I replied, hotly, for the old man's manner was extremely offensive, "you have been very rude to me once before, and I don't feel inclined

to put up with it a second time. I shall sit here just as often as I please."

"You will!"

"And as for your opinion of my being a gentleman, it's a matter to me of the utmost indifference, seeing that I can't look upon you at all as a judge."

We glared at each other for a few seconds, and then the major turned on his heel, muttering, and went out of the Redan down the passage.

Mr. Banquier went on writing, and in a minute or two I heard him get up and put his head out of the window.

"I venture to congratulate you on your firmness, sir," he called to me; "that old gentleman is rapidly constituting himself a nuisance to everybody. It's all fudge about the seat being reserved for the people who live in the Redan. If it be so, I beg you will always occupy my share of it."

I replied shortly (for I was somewhat ruffled) that he was very good, and went on with my book, and Mr. Banquier put in his head and went on with his quill-driving.

. . . But if the affair had its absurd side, it also had its tragic; for, on my going there again this afternoon, what should I find but that burly rascal Ben from the forge (the proprietor of the dirtiest cottage, wife, and children in all Bean's Row) engaged in painting the seat a lively, sticky green! Also, beside his pot of green paint, he had a small, rough notice-board and a pot of white.

"Hullo, Ben!" I said, disgusted, "why on earth are you painting the seat?"

.

"It's a half-crown job," he grinned, "from the major," who, doubtless, snuffing the ancient soldierly scent of powder about him, has (he tells me) already given him an occasional shilling.

Now I knew enough of Ben and his desires to be aware that for half a crown he would willingly paint his dearest friend sky-blue ; so I at once determined to go one better than my cunning old foe.

At the same time, I didn't quite see the sense of the major's move, for the paint would dry, and he must know I should come back. Perhaps he thought I was only going to be in Thorpe a few days ; or perhaps he designed it generally as a demonstration of rights of ownership.

Nor was there much sense in my getting Ben only to paint half, except that it was the half facing the entrance, while I always sat on the other. At any rate, it was a counter demonstration, like the pulling down of a fence in a right-of-way case ; which is promptly rebuilt, by-the-way.

So I said, "Paint only half, Ben, to begin with, and I'll give you five shillings."

Ben's eyes started out of his head with cupidity. "Where's the major?" he asked, blowing hard.

I said I didn't know and didn't care (he was keeping out of the way, I suppose, till the trick was done, for he never appeared), but there was the five shillings. And "What are you doing with that board?" I asked.

Ben took a large piece of paper out of his pocket, and declared he had instructions to paint the words it contained on it. The words for him to copy ran in a large printed hand :

“NOTICE.—This seat is reserved exclusively for the use of the residents in the Redan. *By order.*”

“All right,” I replied, knowing that Ben was an unlettered genius, “you finish doing half the seat and I’ll paint the notice for you. You’d only turn all the n’s the wrong way.”

Ben looked doubtful. “Now you get on with your job,” I said, “and I’ll get on with mine, and then you can be off.”

Ben grinned again, scenting money and mischief (two rare condiments in life), and fell to slapping on the green paint manfully. I knelt down by the seat, and inserting a judicious *not* before the *reserved*, soon had the notice finished. Ben had brought a hammer and nails, and in another five minutes we had the board comfortably nailed pretty high up on the trunk of the elm.

Rather small I felt fighting the major in this way ; but since I was to be in Thorpe for the summer, and liked the elm seat, why, fight him I would. And if the weapons he chose were paint-brushes, how could I refuse to meet him ?

So far we had gone uninterrupted. Mr. Banquier and Miss Harewood were playing tennis behind the Hall ; I had seen them crossing the Green with their racquets as I came along. As for the other residents in the Redan, no one ever took any notice of them, seeing they were quiet retired grocers and linen-draper from Warford, whose very existence it is part of the religion of Thorpe entirely to ignore. Only the parson throws them a little patronage now and then, which, as often as not, has the effect of

driving them to the small drab Wesleyan chapel that almost faces the forge. Even Mrs. Chick speaks slightly of the class, as people who are neither one thing nor the other.

They must be an immovable, stay-at-home set, too; for, often as I have sat in the Redan, I have never seen any one come out of the other houses. Rarely, indeed, at the closed windows, behind the triangles of geranium and musk, have I observed a few queer, plain, debit-and-credit-looking faces.

But as I was getting down triumphantly off the seat Mrs. Pearce comes rustling out of No. 5. She is Miss Harewood's distant relative and companion, the widow of an officer in the army; one of those tiresome, vain old women who, however small the social function, delights in drenching her handkerchief with scent, and heaping herself with her richest clothes.

For it is a mistake to suppose that vanity is the exclusive property of the young. It's just as marked in some women at sixty as sixteen. I'll be bound one could as effectually depress Mrs. Pearce by telling her she's not "in face to-day" (as Miss Hardcastle says), as any young girl thirsting for conquests at her first ball.

Nor is personal vanity the failing of the *beau sexe* alone. If any doubt it, let them just come with me to the club one evening and observe the tender glances at the glass as gentlemen stroll past with the evening paper, the long and loving looks as gentlemen wash their hands for dinner.

I remember once, voyaging from Brindisi, how interested I used to be watching my cabin companion attentively vaseline his noble countenance all

over before retiring for the night. He was a brave fellow, too, a V.C.; though, to be sure, he rather shocked me by having the V.C. painted on all his luggage, even on his hat-box. I thought he might have been brave enough not to do that.

Bless me! what an improving (and, for the matter of that, comforting) essay might be indited on the weaknesses and trivialities of great and noble minds. Just think of the childish bragging of Wolfe; the girlish, restless vanity of Nelson; the posing and underbred self-consciousness of Byron. I sometimes think great men are something like great cities—they are apt to have terrible slums.

In the meantime Mrs. Pearce regards us, putting up long tortoise-shell glasses.

"Painting the seat?" she cried, in high society tones of displeasure. "What a perfectly monstrous thing! We shall all be poisoned. Who has dared to order it?"

Ben stopped his dabbing and slapping in alarm, and I took off my straw hat. "It was Major Ross who had given the order," I said.

"Horrible, prying old man!" was Mrs. Pearce's sharp reply. (So it apparently isn't she he admires, or the admiration would surely be mutual.) "How dare he, without consulting us first? Right opposite our windows!"

"That was the reason," I cunningly answered, "why in a certain measure I had ventured to counteract the order by only having the farther half of the seat done, to begin with."

"You did quite right," said Mrs. Pearce, with some graciousness, "perfectly right! And will you

be good enough to tell that man that if he dares to touch the seat again without orders from us all, he shall be sent straight to prison?"

"You hear, Ben!" I said, severely, while Ben wiped his forehead with the back of his immense black hand in agitation.

"I shall most certainly complain to Mr. Kearsley"—of whom, by-the-way, Mrs. Chick declares that Mrs. Pearce has hopes—was her parting shot as she sailed away majestically to tea at the Hall. But she daren't take the Green on her way, being mortally afraid of the geese thereon.

So I bundled Ben off with his pots out of the Redan, and, pausing awhile to admire the effect of my board, went home with mingled feelings of apprehension and content to my rocky home-made cake and tea.

Now I hadn't been an hour at my law-book before round comes the major foaming, to demand explanations.

"Major Ross would like to see you for a moment, sir," announces Mrs. Chick with staid astonishment.

To which I, delighted at the interruption (for, frankly, I loathe work), replied that I begged Major Ross to be good enough to step into me here.

And step into me he did! "I'm told that tomfoolery with the board is your work," he stuttered, choking with rage. "You impudent cub! How dare you!"

"I don't particularly care, Major Ross," I replied with dignity—oh yes, with great dignity—"about being insulted and abused in my own rooms. So long as you're here, I beg you'll keep your temper."

"Now look you here, sir," he snarled, pointing a trembling, lean, gray finger at me, "I give you fair warning, that if you come and sit in the Redan again I shall take steps to have you forcibly removed."

"An assault, Major Ross?" I asked, with the importance of the junior bar, raising shocked eyebrows.

"You may call it an assault, if you please," he shouted; "I call it the removal of what threatens to be an intolerable nuisance. Now, remember! I've warned you."

And with that he slams himself out of the room and off of the farm. Evidently his particular form of insanity is the keeping the Redan free of strangers.

What on earth does it all mean? Is he, by chance, the eternal type of retired, cross-grained, ancient *militaire*, whose special business it always seems to set everybody in his neighborhood by the ears? Country towns generally can boast of such a one—the unemployed martial spirit venting itself in libels and slanders and general hateful aggressiveness.

It was the proud boast of Cromwell's army, when it was disbanded, that the crime of the country was in no way increased, as every one prophesied it would be thereby. No, the Ironsides and Independents settled down to be farm-hands and peaceful hucksters and hostlers (some of them even, at the Restoration, went quietly on the stage), just as though the fifteen years (I think it was) of fighting and free quarters had never been. But I've no doubt they indulged in their religious and their social battles, and refought Naseby and Marston Moor just as unrelentingly with their tongues as ever they had done with pike and sword.

But why does the major attack me, absolutely the person most desirous of being left alone in all Thorpe? Oh, it's a nice position for the gentleman who has come here in search of quiet, isn't it?

When Mrs. Chick came in to clear the table for dinner, I couldn't help taking her into my confidence. "Do you know," I asked, "if Major Ross makes himself as offensive to other people as he's doing to me?"

Mrs. Chick laughed, and declared that, when she heard him shouting at me, she nearly sent for Chick to come and part us. She can't understand it at all; for, except with Ben of the forge, she's never heard of his exchanging a word with a soul.

"I shall go round and see him after dinner," I said; "a little quiet talk will soon put us right."

"I wouldn't do that, sir," replied Mrs. Chick, tranquilly; "he's as likely as not to strike you."

However, after dinner, out I started, rather nervously, for my assault on the Redan.

On the railings by the pond, at the angle of the road turning up to the church, a few men and boys were sitting, talking and smoking. I could see their dark, huddled forms in the starlight, and the glow of their pipes. A hush as I approached. Then the most curious calls "Good-night," to see who it is. I answer "Good-night," and as I go up towards the Green, after a brief silence, they begin to speculate where I am going.

The church-clock struck nine as I turned down the flagged passage into the tiny square. Some of the windows of the little houses were already dark; from others the light streamed through the blinds

on to the railings in patches on the dusty ground. In No. 13 the light was darker, as though the lamp there was turned half down. No. 5 was close drawn, but an upper shaft struck rigid through a chink, and across it I could see the night-moth dance.

As I turned towards Major Ross's I saw a most unexpected and singular sight. It so chanced I stopped in front of his second window, where, the white curtains being rather skimpy, there was a space between them. The room, a large one for so small a house, looked absolutely bare—at any rate, of anything approaching ornament. It was lighted by a single candle that stood on the table in a flat tin candlestick.

By the table an elderly man was sitting. His hair was rough, he had a thick mustache and a sprouting beard of many days' growth. I could see his face very plainly. The forehead was so ridged with lines I thought he was lifting his eyebrows. The cheeks were drawn and hollow; the well-formed nose was pinched and thin; the mouth, half-open and tense, as in Bellini's decollated head of John the Baptist. The man's temple was resting on his hand, and, by the way the hand slipped away from him occasionally, I thought him either drunk or half-asleep.

But the strange thing was that at this man's knees (this man, who was a tramp off the road, if ever I saw one) Major Ross was kneeling and doing—what do you suppose? Why, washing his feet! There could be no sort of doubt about it. There was the basin and there was the jug (I could see the rising steam), and there was Major Ross with a

sponge, his right sleeve turned up, sponging away as deftly and tenderly as a woman.

In a minute or two he got up from his knees, and after looking at the man, patted him encouragingly on the shoulder and went out of the room.

While he was away the tramp roused himself, turned and looked round the room, half dazed, and round towards the door over his shoulder. Then he bent down and looked at his bare feet, took them out of the water and examined them closely, the heels and the ball of his great toe, and then he took up his boots and looked at them, broken and down at heel; the kind of boot you see lying by the roadside, discarded by some scornful haymaker or acre-hand for a pair less wayworn given him by the farmer.

In a few moments Major Ross returned with an old handkerchief, which he began tearing into strips. I could see his lips moving as he talked. The man looked up at him and watched him stupidly. As the major talked, his eyes glanced out of the window and met mine. I was standing in the shadow, and he couldn't see me. He looked down at his strips again, and took a little pot of vaseline, or something like it, out of his coat-pocket.

When he had torn his strips and duly anointed them he knelt at the man's feet again, and the man dozed and started and woke, and nearly scorched his poor lined forehead in the flame of the draughty candle.

The next moment, in his drowsiness, his hand dropped into the flame, and the room was dark.

The church-clock struck the quarter in its thin,

worn voice as I turned to go. Across the Green the rectory looked solid and comfortable; the study was lighted and cheerful. Insensibly I found myself speculating whether Mr. Kearsley would have taken in this tramp and tended him, as Major Ross was doing, so pityingly, so tenderly.

Let me hope I wrong him, but I couldn't think of this clergyman kneeling to wash the scarred, broken feet; no, nor tearing one of those large, soft, white cambric handkerchiefs of his into strips to bind them. He would, I dare say, have sent him into the kitchen to get a meal, and, after his own dinner, gone and looked at him; given him advice and a shilling, perhaps, and then seen him carefully off the premises.

And quite enough, too, most people would think. I dare say, but it isn't Christianity.

As for me, I sat smoking a while and went to bed, feeling more than ever kindly inclined towards the major. Ah! I wish the old fellow would be friends; I can't bear quarrelling with an old man. He's poor and lonely (probably, poor old gentleman, he saves all he can for his boy's education at Mr. Ferrier's expensive establishment out at Heath Hill), and doubtless has had something direful in his life to sour him. People aren't habitually ill tempered for nothing.

My friend, the major, I hope I may one day venture to call him. There's some absurd music-hall song with the same title, by-the-way.

CHAPTER VII

BANQUIER-MEPHISTO—FANNY-MARGUERITE

Saturday Morning.

THIS is the day the poets sing of when they sing of summer—balmy, dreamy, filmy; as the midsummer morning that broke over Athens when the politic small tradesmen in the evening were to rehearse their show.

I can see Bottom meeting Snug with his tools on his shoulder and winking mysteriously up at the cloudless sky, by token it will be cool and sweet out in the green wood what time the town lamps are lit.

Absolutely impossible to do any work this morning—I can't be bothered with law on so simply perfect a day—so I sit me down to consider what may be going on between Miss Harewood and Mr. Banquier; in what stage may be the outrageous flirtation old Mrs. Martin referred to, and which I can't help observing for myself; for, wherever I go, whenever I put my nose outside the door, there I'm pretty sure to meet them strolling about together—alone, quite apart from the rest, as curates say with their choice redundancy—talking and laughing, freely and confidentially and unchaperoned.

Now, I don't believe, prim old maid that I am, in allowing young people to see so much of each other

as all that. I believe implicitly in the *chaperon*. I don't believe much, I'm afraid, in trusting people; for trusting, in my experience, often means temptation, and are we not all Adamites?

Let me consider. Here's a pleasant English village, a pretty girl, a young man who presumably admires her, and who, from all I hear, is in a position to marry in a modest way. What should he want more than Mr. Mudie's old-fashioned, three-volumed mutual hopes and fears; dulcet quarrelling and still more dulcet making up; and then the engagement and the ineffable gurgle of the *Voice that Breathed*? In short, if they are not speedily engaged and the engagement announced, we proper folk in Thorpe will want to know what that silly old Mrs. Pearce is about.

You see, I'm bound to remember it's not the first time the young couple have met. They met first in London some six weeks ago (oh, we're rare gossips, Mrs. Chick and I!), when Mr. Banquier, in search of retirement for the freer play of inspiration, heard of the village from Miss Fanny, and determined to try it, with his quill pens and cigarettes and embryo novel. Followed her down here, in fact. But what does he mean, now that he *is* here? Merely to flirt? merely to have some one attractive to walk about with when he's not writing? And then, when he's tired of it all, when the poor girl's happiness lies entirely in his hands, to shirk his responsibilities and make a disgraceful exit?

To which, I'm bound to say, the sensible British part of me promptly replies, "Pooh, nonsense! let silly Thorpe mind its own business, and you, too. If Mr. Banquier is judicious (which I've no doubt he

is, notwithstanding he writes white-faced novels) he'll marry the girl if he likes her well enough, and if he doesn't he won't. Quite right, too. There's no more disastrous absurdity than being jerked into an engagement by mere force of public opinion. If I were Mr. Banquier, not all the Mrs. Grundys in the empire should draw me to the altar if I didn't want to go. No, sir! If I liked to walk about with a girl and flirt with her, I would; and if I didn't like her well enough to marry, I wouldn't. And that, as the Irish say, should be the Holy All of it. And as for your broken hearts—" The sentence closes with a peal of hearty, honest, John Bull, incredulous mirth.

All very well, honest John, to laugh, but it won't do to be behind the times, either in business or in love. You must remember Banquier is the modern literary aspirant, and that for him your simple, manly, British flirting isn't enough. Jaded as an actor, he demands passion, tears, remorse. He desires to take the trusting female heart, and give it such a squeeze, such a wrench, that the poor soul can't breathe, and is ever after subject to fainting-fits. In a word, I mistrust the modern literary affections. Ever since Goethe set the fashion, these little fellows, his spawn, think of nothing but their miscalled development, at whatever cost.

Poor Frederika! thou hast been the sad forerunner of many a broken heart.

If only you read French, John, I might refer you *passim* to Maurice Barrès and his utterly despicable *moi*.

Why, the Banquiers of this world—and how many of them there are!—look on life as merely one large

field for copy, literary material. *Give us this day our daily copy!* is almost the only prayer they are capable of.

No, I don't think I'm unjust, nor am I utterly condemning a man I don't know, for I know the type. The heavy, rather handsome face; the deep-set, scrutinizing eye; the spatulate, quasi-artist's hand—something, in short, of the physique of Faust and the purpose of Mephisto, all boiled up in the witches' kitchen, seething with the scum of *décadence*. A dangerous mixture, truly. Just the potion a young girl likes to taste and intoxicate herself with, however good she may be by nature.

Nay, honest John, don't be shocked at me; I assure you I know what I'm talking about. I've seen a good deal of all sorts of life, you know, and while I know quite well how good it can be, I also know very well how bad. People try to cheat you, don't they, over your jute and Manchester goods, to overreach you on the Corn Exchange and at Lloyds? Well, they do just the same with your daughters in the gayer Courts of Love. "The readiness is all," John Bull; "the readiness is all"—to prevent it. Hence the chaperon.

As for me, I can do little else at present but sit in the stalls and watch the play; but if a catastrophe, great or small, be imminent, I should like to do my share in scenting and diverting it. I shall be delighted, for instance, to climb on the stage and pull the villain's nose if I find he really threatens innocence.

Perhaps, by the way, that's the secret of Major Ross's attitude. He spies Mrs. Pearce's entire ineffi-

ciency, and, taking a liking to Miss Fanny, has determined not to see her hurt.

On the other hand, it's more than likely the John Bull part of me is right, and that I shall find it's all nonsense to take the situation seriously. I dare say, with all her frankness and apparent girlish simplicity, Miss Fanny is perfectly qualified to look after herself. Most girls are, nowadays. I dare say she laughs over it all as she lies, cunning virgin, in bed in the morning. "*Toutes les jeunes filles sont moqueuses*," as Balzac says.

There's another saying of Balzac's I should like to commend to Mr. Banquier and other gentlemen of his kidney: "*Le vrai roman, c'est le mariage*." And Balzac knew what he was writing about, if ever man did.

Indeed, it all seems like it—I mean, seems as though Miss Fanny could take care of herself—for Mrs. Chick tells me the artful creature carried on just as deeply with Mr. John Poynder, Sir Arthur's soldier son, when he was down here before Easter. Very hard hit was Mr. John, in the opinion of Thorpe, and Lady Poynder was greatly relieved to see him go without declaring himself, as, in the low state of their fortunes, they are naturally anxious for him to marry money.

Well, I'm sure I hope he may. I confess to a secret admiration (duly mingled with contempt) for the man who frankly marries for money. Johnson says it's mostly weak men who marry for love. I venture to wonder what, in the name of goodness, he married that monstrous old Tetty of his for?

As for Miss Fanny (observed by me merely on the

wing), I judge she bows and smiles when she is introduced, takes sugar in her tea, crooks her little finger over her bread-and-butter—in short, behaves just as one would expect a well-brought-up young lady to behave in any social emergency. At this actual moment I estimate there must be at least two million young ladies, smiling as brightly, talking as correctly, dressing as becomingly, and thinking as clearly as Miss Fanny Harewood, in England alone.

In person she is tall rather than short, and her figure is exceedingly slim and pretty. She wears her hair—gleams of bronze in it—brushed off her smooth forehead, somewhat high, in a sort of *pouf*; not a tight, hard *pouf*, but loose and gadding. Her hair is dark, her eyes hazel, her brows dark and arched. Beautiful teeth, very pretty feet, and the hands particularly so, as I have seen them, ungloved, go waving past. Brown, of course, as befits a country girl's; cool and firm, smooth and tense almost as marble across the back, without a nervous vein. Neither too narrow nor too broad, with fingers rather long and slender.

In short, she suggests to me a frank and wholesome English Diana; not, perhaps, of the woods and upland lawns, but more of Queen's Gate Gardens and the Row.

Not particularly amusing herself, I should imagine, but with the keenest sense of other people's fun; not particularly well read, I suppose, but probably likes and enjoys a good book, with a story in it. Fresh enough still from the school-room, clearly, to know something about the French kings, *Pepin le Bref* and *Louis le Débonnaire*; anxious, no doubt,

still to improve herself, and, to that end, belongs to a half-hour reading society (for which the doctor tells me his *fiancée*, Miss Constance Ryle, collects the fines), and is at present, I guess, in a rare condition of sensitive young-lady-like confusion over their Lamartine's *History of the Girondins*.

So appears to me Miss Fanny Harewood, as I see her strolling about the village and across the green.

And is that all she conveys to me on the wing? —the mere profile of a girl, the mere shadowy silhouette of the stage *ingénue*? But—my goodness! what about her secret hopes and wishes, her strong, electric female will, her sweet enthusiasms, her power of elevating mere man? Does she give me no impression as she passes, throw off no atmosphere of subtle chambers of the heart and mind, where only the high-priest, the chosen one, shall enter with all the hush and mystery of worship?

H'm—H'm! very little, I confess; I confess that not very many young girls (outside of the pages of fiction) do. The fact is, I am no great believer in the mysterious *tête de jeune fille* of the more respectable (and, to me, insipid) French romances. If the *tête* be mysterious, it really mostly is so only as the dark is mysterious; for every room (even the most commonplace) is mysterious until you take in a lighted candle.

It is our sex that, consciously or not, plays the brilliant office of candle-bearer to the other. We carry short sixes, dips, rush-lights, spermaceti, the best wax, the most reeking, guttering tallow; every conceivable kind of homely and superfine illuminator that can throw light into a young girl's heart and

mind ; inform them, for the first time, how they are furnished, where are the angles and where the cosey corners ; what are the books, the pictures, and prove how elegant and becoming is, in capable male hands, a deftly managed *chiaroscuro*. So that, at the most, in my judgment, your young girl's heart and mind rarely rise to a higher power than that of the *clair-obscur*, a sort of moonlighting.

Of course, the extent of the illumination depends on the candle-power carried. Mystery reappears, very properly, if in the male flight, too fast or too eccentric, towards the object of predilection. But these be secrets, and silence touches her nether lip.

What stage of illumination Miss Fanny may be in at present it's hard to guess. Something about her makes the impression on me that Mr. Banquier is not holding his light very steadily, and Miss Fanny is puzzled and not a little frightened at the intermittence of the gleam. It may be art on the young man's side ; it may be inefficiency. We shall see.

And I end as I began, by asking myself, this beautiful May morning, why she is allowed to be so much alone with Mr. Banquier.

CHAPTER VIII

A COUNTRY WALK—A COMMUNICATION FROM THE MAJOR—SUNDAY NIGHT

Mrs. CHICK is playing a hymn, slowly and heavily. She sings—I can only hear the shrill high notes—while Mr. Chick sits by smoking moodily under the comforting impression he's doing something religious after his day's work.

Mr. Chick was quietly jubilant the last time I saw him, yesterday morning; he had swopped a cow, that had given over presenting them with milk, for a horse. An old horse, though, fit only to do a little work in the fields. Still, he had got far the best of the bargain, and was jubilant.

Since then I have been a trudge round, over some twenty miles of country, brilliant with harebell, vocal with the cuckoo. Dr. Martin thought the walk would do me good, get me into condition for the match next Saturday against Watterley Parva; so I took my faithful brown bag and a thin pair of breeches (which, with a light heart, will go through the world, they say), and after lunch off I started, with Mrs. Chick's severest injunction to be back in time for dinner on Sunday.

... Home again I walked on Sunday, through Calham and Burford, and had tea in the "Barley-Mow."

The shifting sunlight falls into the yellow and white kitchen, where I sit at tea, through the little square window-panes, diamond-scrawled, on to the stone floor. Hams in white bags hang up the shiny black chimney, a sketch-book and a knapsack are on the chair. There are women's voices from the parlor, not quite ladies' voices.

I met the fair owners crossing the bridge with strides of the *corps-de-ballet* (the regular "taking the stage" way) in straw hats, white bodices, and scarlet skirts—*Frisette et Musette, sur l'eau*.

Frisette and *Musette* like to get away into a field and gather handfuls of moon daisies, being deeply superstitious. No, they tell their gentlemen friends, they want to go alone, please. They don't want any male company when they pick flowers and are simple once more; the past is all the more difficult for them to recall in male company.

"A mad world, my masters!" The hostess of the "Barley-Mow," in a red jersey, laughs shrilly and flies hither and thither, flaming like a comet. The not-quite ladies scream with merriment in the parlor. Then the deeper voices of the men. The church-bells for evening service begin to float across the meadows and the river with faint and penetrating melancholy. So the world jangles. They start singing "The anchor's weighed" most wofully out of tune.

Oh, it's a mad world! but nothing is surer than this, that we all can make it sane enough if we choose.

I was back on the farm at half-past eight for supper. I find that Mr. Chick's friend, Joe Tamplin,

plays hymns, too. I am beginning to know his *touch*, shall I dare call it? But, then, I must remember it's heavy land hereabouts.

I asked Mrs. Chick if any event of importance had occurred in Thorpe during my absence, for somehow one always fancies that if one leaves a place for a few hours something remarkable is bound to happen. She said well, yes; she had heard Major Ross had taken on a servant, an old tramp of a soldier she believed he was, picked up on the road.

"Oh, has he?" I innocently replied. I couldn't very well tell Mrs. Chick I'd seen the major washing the poor wretch's feet. She'd have thought me as mad as she evidently believes the major.

Oh, and she'd forgotten a letter that had been sent round to me from the Redan on Saturday afternoon, half an hour after I had left. It was written on shiny village note-paper, in a fierce, stabbing sort of fist, and ran as follows :

"No. 1. The Redan, *May* 19.

"Major Ross's compliments to Mr. F.

"Major Ross has been thinking over his last conversation with Mr. F., and is willing to withdraw his embargo on Mr. F.'s use of the seat in dispute on the following conditions :

"*First* : that it is *never* used by him in the morning, nor later in the afternoon than five.

"*Second* : that if it is wanted, while in Mr. F.'s temporary occupation, by any of the *duly qualified* residents in the Redan, Mr. F. will at once retire and not attempt to force his society on them.

"*Third* : that before using it, he will wait till the

contemplated repainting of it is finished—a repainting long designed by Major Ross, until so incredibly interrupted by Mr. F.

“If these conditions are not complied with, Major Ross will use such steps to eject Mr. F. as may seem good to him. EDWARD ROSS, *Major*.”

“*Wot an old fireworks it is!*” as Mr. Weller, senior, said of Mr. Pickwick.

As for me, I sat down after supper and answered at once.

“Chick’s Farm, Sunday Night.

“DEAR MAJOR ROSS,—Many thanks for your communication. It is not my wish to quarrel with any one, anywhere, least of all in Thorpe, where I have come for quiet. So long as I remain here, it will be my wish faithfully to observe your conditions as to the use of the Redan seat.

“Very truly yours,

W. F.”

Absurder storm in a teacup never was, but at all events the troubled waters won’t slop over now into the saucer, let us hope.

I forgot to record that mid-day yesterday, before starting, I looked into our church, and, to my wonder, saw the good major’s tramp kneeling on the dull red cushions in front of the altar rails praying.

What a subject for a picture for the Newlyn School! The bent, huddled, discouraged figure, the dusty hair, the moving dry lips, the tired hands clutching the rails, and the pleasant May sunshine drifting into the old church, and the glimpse through

the open door into the tumbled church-yard and among the cottage flowers beyond.

What was he praying for? for mercy and forgiveness, for courage and the power to do better, for a blessing on the major?

“Draw nigh unto Him, and He will draw nigh unto you.” ’Tis for such as he, for all of us who are wretched, the blessed words are writ.

I suppose, if the major means to keep him, it will be to constitute him janissary, or broom of the chambers, to sweep the Redan clean, should necessity arise, of such impertinences as I.

Also I am told that this afternoon Dr. Martin called to ask me to go round with him to-morrow and play tennis behind the Hall. Mrs. Chick tells me that other old solitary, Sir Arthur Poynder, allows the youth and fashion of Thorpe to use his lawn for tennis twice a week. On such occasions he rarely puts in an appearance; but once a fortnight there’s a club meeting, and Lady Poynder dispenses tea—for which, of course, the club pays, adds Mrs. Chick.

CHAPTER IX

DR. MARTIN IS CALLED IN—TRAMP BUNDY—THORPE
HALL—MISS FANNY HAREWOOD

DR. MARTIN came out of his hall door, ready for tennis, as I turned down the narrow walk, bordered with pansies and stocks.

He shut the door very softly, and spoke in mysterious low tones till we were well out of the front gate; from which I gathered his grandmamma was enjoying her afternoon nap, and that immense precautions were necessary to prevent her waking.

"You're coming back to supper," he remarked, confidentially; as much as to say, "I've had the greatest difficulty in winning the old lady's consent, but I've managed it for you all the same."

As soon as we might be supposed out of ear-shot of the sleeper (who, I need scarcely remind you, is, even when awake, extremely deaf) the good doctor's voice assumed its normal tones, and, regarding me protectively, he said, "Well, you're beginning to find your way about a bit, eh?"

I said yes, I was, and the surrounding country as well.

"Funny place, Thorpe," he resumed; "dash my wig if I don't think my old granny's right and the people are all mad. That rough old customer, Major

Ross, sent for me Saturday night to see a tramp he's giving shelter to. I found the chap lying in bed, if you please, on the floor of the back room, and the major walking about the bare boards in his stockings for fear of waking him, muttering to himself and tearing his hair, as if the beggar had been an only child."

"Was the man really ill?" I asked; "I saw him in the church in the morning."

"Deuce you did!" ejaculated the doctor, "after the sacred plate, I should think. Oh, he's run down, of course; want of food and sleep, but he'll pull round all right. The major clutched my arm like a horse's bite. '*Look there, sir!*' says he, '*that poor creature—neglected!—deserted!—and—and—*' and then his jaw worked and his eyes half started out of his head, and he couldn't say another blessed word; and then he bent over the chap and roared '*Attention, Bundy! Doctor!*' and walks straight out of the room, waving his arms."

"Did you see him again?"

"See him again! I believe you!" the doctor laughed. "He came round to my place to fetch the medicine. I heard some one walking up and down the flags outside, and when I went to see, there he was, as savage as a hyena. '*Go on with your pounding, sir,*' he shouts, '*confound you! Do you want the man to die?*' He wouldn't come in and wait, and he snatched the bottle from me as if he were as keen as mustard to get home and take it himself."

"Mrs. Chick says he's an old soldier, and that the major's going to take him on as a servant."

"Mrs. Chick always has the latest information,"

the doctor gravely replied, "which she mostly manufactures herself; but seeing the major hasn't got a regular servant and can't afford one, it's quite likely. Odd thing is," he resumed, meditatively, "I had a word or two with him myself yesterday, and he talks like a gentleman."

Just then we heard a loud clacking and hissing of geese on the other side of the common, and there we saw Miss Harewood and Mr. Banquier with their racquets coming across from the Redan.

"Are they coming to play tennis with us?" I asked.

"Suppose they are!" grumbled the doctor. "All I can say is that if the young man isn't a better performer at a novel than he is at tennis, he won't do much good with it."

"Can Miss Harewood play?"

"Pretty fair. She's got some brilliant strokes, but she's fearfully uncertain, smacks a lot into the net. Let's get on a bit, and then we can have a knock-up first, as you haven't had any practice this year."

The old Hall was blinking in the soft afternoon sunshine as we entered the grounds through a small side door in the wall.

There were a few shallow, worn steps that led on to an uneven, irregular terrace, patched and discolored with damp. On one side stood a sundial. There was the maker's name on it, "*William Whittick, Uxbridge, 1723*," and the motto, still legible: "*Horas non numero nisi serenas*"—I mark no hours that are not sunny.

"Fancy old Bill Whittick knowing Latin!" the doctor observed, solemnly.

We passed round the terrace, round the rooms at the angle that were boarded up, and found ourselves at the back, looking into the neglected garden. A couple of basket-chairs stood there, and a paper lay in one of them. I thought so: the *Lady's Pictorial*.

Our soft tennis shoes seemed in keeping with the hopeless silence of the garden and the house. To lighten the solitudes there were rich bunches of lilac; there was a hawthorn, splendid with pink clusters; and of laburnum, sulphur flashes—here and there—as though celestial fire were falling for nature's Pentecost. Away to the left, in the tangle of the kitchen-garden, gleamed the frail apple-blossom, pure as the Paraclete.

The doctor took off his coat to engage me, and displayed a flannel shirt with a neatly embroidered watch-pocket. He is a tennis-player of what we may call the earnest-inefficient order. He frowned and bounded, and nearly burst himself asunder in his efforts, but somehow he was rarely in the right place, and when he was, never by any chance made a stroke.

We had nearly played a couple of sets before Miss Harewood and Mr. Banquier put in an appearance; they had evidently gone for a little walk of their own first. They stood at the angle of the terrace watching us; Miss Fanny in a pink shirt, straw hat, and dark serge skirt, and Mr. Banquier, looking very heavy and unwieldy, in complete white flannels. From the way Mr. Banquier carried his racquet (in a case, too) I could see he didn't know how to use it properly.

With a charming fearlessness—if it be fearless to stand on the edge of a terrace two feet above the ground—Miss Fanny came and stood there, on the extreme edge; the little brown points of her shoes plainly visible, swinging her racquet backward and forward by the end, between finger and thumb.

Then she jumped off the terrace, while Mr. Banquier came clumsily down the few worn steps, walking all on one side, as if he had spurs on.

I know quite well what Mr. Banquier was thinking as I managed to persuade Miss Fanny not to play the first set, but to stroll with me about the garden. He thought I was going to try and establish a flirtation with her myself, to steal her away from him. Silly fellow! he clearly thought it was all my vanity, that I resented his appropriation of the one pretty girl in Thorpe, that I was going to try and cut him out.

I took Miss Fanny—she coming a little reluctantly, I thought—down the weedy paths, and we made our way to what the doctor called the *gazebo* at the bottom of the garden—a shambling old summer-house, like a photographer's deserted, broken studio.

Dismal shanty; the boards were rotting, the yellow and blue glass falling out, like an old man's teeth. There was a cracked croquet-box in it, of the ancient days when they called it "The Cassiobury game."

"I wouldn't go in for anything," said Miss Fanny, peeping warily in at the door. "There are millions of earwigs. Oh, fancy how horrible it must be in the dark!"

She put her pretty brown hand on the door-post, and I noticed that she bites her nails, ever so little; just a nervous trimming of them, perhaps, when she

reads, or sits thinking. But what an indication of restlessness and excitability.

We wandered about the wilderness into the desolate kitchen-garden. She doesn't talk very readily—not at first, at any rate; she seems a little afraid of one, as though she fears you are going to try and “pluck out the heart of her mystery.” She looks up at you with a sort of veiled, cautious look, as though something misty stretched between her soul and yours. She looks straight at you, but the eye is not quite clear, nor yet quite untroubled. It is secretive, and at the same time questioning. It seems to ask me what I am doing in Thorpe, why I am polite to her, why I can't leave her alone; why anybody troubles her about anything, why they don't just let her live and love Mr. Banquier.

She knew all about the Redan seat and Major Ross, and was much amused at it all. I told her of our stately exchange of letters, and tried to discover what her view of the old gentleman was. She said he seemed a poor, lonely, cross old man, but he had certainly once been very polite to her.

“Mrs. Pearce can't bear him,” she added, “but then”—a little maliciously—“Mrs. Pearce can't bear anybody who doesn't show her a good deal of attention, you know.”

As for the tramp, she thought the major's treatment of him very kind, but she wasn't much interested in it. She frowned at the neglect of the kitchen-garden, was displeased with its dreary, unkempt look, as, indeed, she seemed to be just then with everything in Thorpe. Evidently something had gone wrong for the time between her and Mr. Banquier.

He wants to love her in one way, I suppose, and she wants him to love her in another. Eternal discord in the harmony of earthly love!

And then she got dissatisfied suddenly with wandering away from the tennis-court, and suggested our return to it rather severely. Not altogether satisfactory, my first effort to make friends with Miss Fanny Harewood.

And now I think of her and see her as a few hours ago she was standing under the hawthorn-tree, magnificent with its clustered pink, vivid with green; her slim figure drawn up, her racquet and her arms behind her back, straining to tightness her girlish bosom. She leans against the old tree, and she looks up at the fleeting sky; her face seems to change as rapidly—now a white cloud passes over it, and the next minute all is sun and blue. One moment the mouth is a little drawn and sad, the next she smiles; one moment her eyes are quite dark, the next they are brighter than the sea at Shanklin in the summer.

I think she is face to face with her first trouble, the drifting over of her first illusions. She's very young to have to fight it all out alone. I wish she had a mother, some sounder friend than Mrs. Pearce to turn to, some frank, kind heart she could take shelter in.

And then I think why, after all, should I trouble about it; what do lovers' quarrels matter to me. Absolutely nothing. But still I confess that any one else's *chagrin d'amour* affects me as keenly as if it were my own.

My only other item of information is that Tramp Bundy is well enough again to sit on Major Ross's

steps in the sun and do, what I suppose he's been doing all his life, nothing at all. I found him there this afternoon on coming back from tennis, and learned from him that Major Ross had gone over to Mr. Ferrier's to see his boy. He showed no inclination to turn me out of the Redan, but simply looked up at me with the aspect of a genteel, beaten dog.

As the doctor says, his voice has really the tones of a gentleman's; suburban, perhaps, but plainly educated; and now that he's shaved and washed, and dressed up in an old suit of the major's, I see he's not more than six or seven and thirty.

NOTE.—I kept this journal in penny copy-books, procured from the post-office, and in changing my rooms in London one of them (the one that should follow here) has been lost. One can never hope satisfactorily to restore a journal, kept from day to day, after the impressions it records have become so much less clear, nor do I think it necessary in this instance to try. It seems to me enough to say that the lost book contained an account of my introduction to Sir Arthur Poynder; of the supper at the doctor's, where I met Mr. and Mrs. Carlton; and of my solemn presentation to Miss Barth and Mrs. Shine, the vegetarian ladies. There was an account, too, of an afternoon I spent at Laurel Lodge, the vegetarian bower, when Mrs. Shine made a desperate but ineffective assault on my partiality for chops. I remember very well Miss Barth asking me how I dared take life, or be a party to it. "A sheep," she said, "had just as much right to its life as you have to yours. Beauti-

ful sheep! playing about in the fields, happy with its grass and the sunshine."

And I remember Mrs. Shine adding, working away with her needle vindictively, as though she were stabbing a butcher, "It's only murderers who eat meat!"

I resume with the next book, dated rather more than a week later.

CHAPTER X

MISS CONSTANCE RYLE—MR. FERRIER'S SELECT ESTABLISHMENT—DUNCH AND TOMMY ROSS—A PROPOSAL FROM THE MAJOR—THE VEGETARIANS

MISS RYLE, the doctor's *fiancée*, has arrived at Mrs. Martin's for her summer visit. Nicer, more unaffected young lady I don't wish to see.

How I abhor affectation! how it depresses me! I remember last July, sitting next a superior young person at lunch at Taplow, and talking of swimming in the river, she said in her thin, *précieuse* voice, with an absurd self-conscious droop of the lip, "I haven't bathed since I bathed in Tuscany."

Much virtue in a Tuscany! She meant by it, "Ah, my true home is Italy. I can't breathe except in that divine atmosphere. I pant for the Lung' Arno and the Santa Croce. *Retro, Philistine!*"

As if any simpleton couldn't be refined in Italy. Give me the girl whose true refinement comes from doing her duty in Bayswater or Bloomsbury among uncongenial surroundings.

Ah, *Madelon* and *Cathos*, how much need there is of another Molière! how amazingly difficult the *bacillus* is to kill what Johnson calls the coxcombrity of the mind! After two hundred years and more, the country is as full as ever of Hotels Rambouillet—Prig Halls.

Miss Constance Ryle is three - and - twenty, and, though not exactly pretty, has all the blunt attraction, sincerity, and good-humor of a portrait by Hogarth. Her little cock nose is always in the air, and she's always laughing. I imagine the old comedy actresses to have been like her—Mrs. Abingdon, or that earlier charmer, Anne Oldfield, the beloved of General Ogleby.

She, the doctor, and I were to walk over to Mr. Ferrier's, at Heath Hill, to see if we could get Mr. Williams, one of the masters, and Tommy Ross, the major's boy (whom the doctor describes as "a nipper at cricket"), to play for us against Watterley Parva, two of our eleven having failed us at the last.

Mrs. Martin we left sitting outside, under the wistaria, in the sun. A pretty tough old lady. Once, in the doctor's absence, she was left in the garden during a heavy thunder-shower, having fallen asleep in her chair and been forgotten by the maid. She never woke, got wet through, but was not a bit the worse.

We found her still sitting there when we got back, looking like the wife of Rhadamanthus. No one had been with her all the afternoon, her thoughts had been her company.

"That wretched Pearce woman looked in upon me from the gate," she chuckled, "but I wagged my head and pretended to be asleep, and she went away. She ought to be looking after Fanny Harewood instead of tattling about paying visits."

Miss Ryle doesn't know Miss Harewood personally as yet, but only through the distant medium of her half-hour reading society; however, she hopes

to soon, as she says she thinks Fanny looks nice. As for Mr. Banquier, she appears to share the doctor's view, that he's "a conceited bounder."

To reach Mr. Ferrier's school-house, after crossing the fields we turned up off the high-road, followed a winding and ascending leafy drive, and came out on a *plateau* of worn grass, of many tall elms and swings and parallel and horizontal bars. Down to the left, beside a dirty little duck-pond, hung an inert giant's stride.

It was a half-holiday; the boys were all down at cricket on the other side of the hill, except one very small, shrill specimen in short trousers, who was trying to persuade a worried old man in spectacles and mittens, with a barrow of oranges and cakes and sweets, to let him have some of them on credit.

"That's the governor," remarked the doctor; "the boys believe him to be enormously rich, because he's been seen in Oxford Street in the holidays in a tall hat."

The governor, dancing uneasily from one leg to the other, was explaining to the small, shrill boy that he couldn't let him have the chocolate-drops, because he'd promised his brother not to let him go tick never again.

"Hang my *major*!" screamed the small boy; "he's always coming it over me. But look here, governor!—"

"No go, Pontifex!" said the governor, peering up at the elms and dancing slowly. "Your brother and me 'ave 'ad our talk, and it's been decided."

"No go, Pontifex!" echoed the doctor, as we came up, quietly.

"I say, why ain't you playing?"

The small boy looked rather abashed, and explained he'd hurt his hand climbing a tree.

"Well, where's Tommy Ross? Down on the ground?"

"Tommy's kept in," Pontifex grinned. "You'll find him up in Dicky's room, grinding verses. And I say, Dr. Martin, just look at my hand, please. My brute of a *major* says if I ain't very careful it'll mortify and drop off."

He showed the doctor a tiny, dirty paw with the skin off the palm, while Miss Ryle and I walked on down to the school-house to the right. It had once been a pretty old country cottage with a veranda running round it, and old iron balconies covered with creepers. The house still stood in its entirety, given over to the junior masters to sleep in, while new brick class-rooms bulged out on each side of it, like fungi on an old tree.

The doctor joined us in the neat garden, laughing and slapping his leg with his gloves.

"Most extraordinary boys those Pontifexes; always up to something. Last term they actually invented a new religious service; wrote it out, responses and all, and used to give it in the dormitory in their night-gowns, with a toy theatre and an altar which they worshipped, with pastils burning on it. They formed a sort of Druidical procession of the boys round and round, chanting a crazy doggerel. Frightened some of 'em to death. I couldn't make out what was wrong—half the school couldn't sleep—till Ferrier jumped on 'em one night in the middle of their rites. He thrashed the high-priests well,

and burned the theatre, and the revival came to an end."

The doctor took us into the house, through what had once been the drawing-room, now quite bare except for benches and a high desk; up the uncarpeted stairs, freshly washed and smelling of soap, to the landing outside Mr. Ferrier's door.

There we knocked, and, hearing no answer, the doctor opened softly, and we looked in.

Mr. Ferrier (Dickey, as the boys always called him) had his back to us, and was holding a small boy by the elbow, flourishing a long, flexible, vulcanite paper-cutter. Both were laughing, though the paper-cutter was flourishing nearer and nearer the unhappy urchin's funny-bone. At the desk near the window (where tendrils of a creeper twined in as you see them twining in Van Ostade's pictures of Dutch school interiors) a large, stout boy was bent over his books in an attitude of hopeless mental depression. I think he was furtively crying, from the way his left elbow worked.

"*What is the cæsura, Tommy?*" Mr. Ferrier was saying. "*What is the cæsura?*"

"Please, sir, I know, sir," said Tommy Ross, with cheerful alarm, and then he saw us and laughed. The stout boy turned and showed a broad, sad face, em-purpled with grief.

"Tommy in trouble again?" asked the doctor, as Mr. Ferrier rose. He was a tall man of about fifty-five, dressed in loose, old-fashioned pepper-and-salt shooting clothes, with very sweet eyes and a large mobile mouth, fringed with a beard and mustache of just the same pepper-and-salt hue as his clothes.

"The young scoundrels kept me in as usual,"

laughed Mr. Ferrier, shaking hands with us genially—a very hard, thin hand it was, too. “He won’t understand the *cæsura*, and it’s the simplest thing in the world.”

“Oh yes, rather!” Tommy put in, blandly. “How old were you, sir, when you understood it?” To which Mr. Ferrier’s reply was to lean over quickly and cut him with the paper-knife.

“Poor Tommy!” sighed Miss Ryle, “that was a hot one.”

The stout boy gurgled and rubbed his fat legs with dismal mirth.

While Mr. Ferrier talked to the doctor and Miss Ryle, I looked about the room and at Tommy Ross, who had retreated to a corner to rub his elbow. He was very small for his age, and though he was thirteen, didn’t appear more than ten; rather frail and delicate-looking, with a girl’s slender neck and an inquisitive way of holding up his pointed chin that somehow made you laugh. His bright eyes were brown, his stubborn little button of a nose was freckled as a blackbird’s egg, and he apparently suffered from an inability to shut his mouth.

“Such a funny mouth, for it wouldn’t shut.”

Wholesomer, merrier English lad no father could wish for, and not a trace in him of the grim old major that I could discover. His mother must have been a charmingly pretty woman.

I sauntered quietly round behind Mr. Ferrier, and, sitting on the bench, got hold of his verse book and paper. It was the same book I used to use as a boy (I remember so well the first verse about the black

horse rejoicing in the fields), and, while I engaged him in conversation, wrote down two or three of his hexameters.

"Who's your fat friend?" I whispered.

"The stout un?" giggled Tommy in ecstasy. "Chap named Dunch. Good name, ain't it? All our beaks call him the Dunch, he's so thick."

"He's in trouble, eh?"

"Oh, he can blubber whenever he likes," confided Tommy, "only Dicky don't know it. If he can't see his way out, he always turns on the tap. Great larks! We often make him cry down at the other house. 'Now cry, old Dunch,' we say, and he blubbers at once like a seal. He don't mind; he says it's all good practice."

I finished Tommy's verses, and Tommy, saying "half a shake," proceeded to copy them out. "Better make one mistake," he chuckled, "or Dicky 'll twig."

Mr. Ferrier turned to get his hat and stick, and seemed rather puzzled to know what to do meantime with the two delinquents. Tommy helped him by saying, in a small voice, "Please, sir, I think I know now," and stepped up demurely with my three verses. He stood with the end of the pen in his mouth modestly regarding the bare floor, while Mr. Ferrier looked them over.

"Do these yourself, Tommy?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Well, sir, I wrote them out myself."

"Wretched boy!"

"Yes, sir."

"You've made one hideous mistake, but you may go."

"Thank you, sir."

Whereupon the talented Dunch set up a plaintive cry and laid his large, untidy head on the desk.

"Oh, poor boy!" sighed Miss Ryle, "mayn't he go, too?"

"Run along, Dunch," said Mr. Ferrier, impatiently, "and do get out of that habit of weeping."

Dunch was too much of an artist to reply. He passed out with streaming eyes, and, mounting a straw hat that stuck on the top of his head like a plate, clattered down the stairs.

Mr. Richard Ferrier, in a round hat with a straight brim, drew on an old pair of dog-skin gloves and left us in the playground to fetch his retriever. He walked very upright, and in his old-fashioned coat, fastened high with one button, looked like a John Leech dandy of 1860, grown elderly.

So he passed briskly with his dog down through the green fields of the hill-side, down to the cricket-ground, to get Mr. Williams to play for us on Saturday against Watterley Parva, and to encourage his boys in their fielding. The doctor tells me he has the remains of a sweet and trembling tenor voice, and on the last night of term always sings them the same old song about "an oak, an oak, a brave old English oak, boys!"

Meantime, Tommy Ross had run into the house and fetched out some stumps and a bat, and proceeded to drive the wickets on the worn *plâteau* under the elms. The doctor bowled, and Miss Constance kept wicket. We pressed the unwieldy Dunch as long-stop, while I lazily performed the office of cover-point, seated under a tree. Dunch took off

his coat to stop the balls, and, his mouth full of chocolate-drops, leaped about with cries of alarm and enjoyment.

The doctor coached Tommy as he bowled. "For mercy's sake, Tommy, don't move your right foot! Bring your shoulders forward. Get well over the ball. Now hit him! Well done!"

"Well done, Tom!" exclaimed a voice at my elbow, and, looking up, I saw the major.

Tommy ran up to kiss his father, while Dunch lunged after the smartly hit ball. The old man kissed his boy lovingly, and patted him with trembling eagerness on the back; he was evidently delighted at the cleanness of the little chap's smack to leg.

"He is a nipper," said the generous doctor.

I confess I felt a certain amount of awkwardness in the major's presence, remembering how he and I last parted; but the awkwardness was confined, apparently, to myself alone, for he came up to me at once with a stiff bow and said, "How d'you do?"

I rose, and was congratulating him on his son and his achievements, when he interrupted me with—"I have been to your rooms, sir, to see you, but was told you were likely to be up here. May I ask the favor of some few minutes' talk?"

I said yes, certainly, and we strolled together down to the gravel playground. What was coming? Any more commands about the Redan?

The major began at once. "I am of course aware," he said, with a short sort of laugh, "that the terms on which we last parted, in fact," with some hesitation, "the terms on which we have always hitherto

met"—his one reference to his outrageous behavior in the train!—"rather preclude me from asking a favor of you, but, nevertheless, it is a favor I have to ask."

I replied I should be glad to have it in my power to prove how sorry I was for the heat and rudeness of my share of our last conversation.

"Never mind that, sir!" said the major, with somewhat aggravating magnanimity; "we both lost our tempers—always unfortunate between gentlemen. Let us forget it—and—and the other," he added with a gulp.

"I understand, sir," he went on, after a pause, "you are engaged here in literary occupation. May I ask if it is of such a nature as to require assistance? I don't mean so much in the intellectual as in the clerical sense. In short," with some impatience, as though he were suddenly tired of keeping the conversation on so stilted a level, "doesn't your work require any copying, or rearranging, or note-taking, or something merely mechanical of that sort?"

I was so taken aback that I replied, foolishly enough, that I didn't know that it did; and then corrected myself hurriedly to that, on the other hand, I wasn't so sure that it mightn't.

"If," replied the major, testily, "you would kindly make up your mind, I should be obliged to you. The fact is, I am interested in a poor fellow, a man of education, who—through no fault of his own—finds himself unfortunately very much reduced, and for whom I am anxious to find employment. He doesn't want so much to earn any great sums of money as to get something to do. I may be able to

find work for him later on, but that always takes time, and till then I shall be glad to know that he's employed and earning something, if only a little. Now, can't you manage to let him come to you for a few hours a day at a merely nominal sum? I don't know, of course, how you feel on the subject, but it seems to me such an arrangement might be a convenience to you both."

I asked cautiously (scenting, of course, Bundy, the tramp) if the major's protégé could write pretty well.

"Pretty well?" echoed the major, "why, my good friend, he's been a solicitor's clerk, and can either write the Lord's Prayer inside a threepenny piece, or a large hand, so that you can't tell it from the original copy-book. I made him show me before making the application."

Now, I am no better than my fellows, and when a proposal of this sort is made to me, I do as I suppose others do—turn it over rapidly in my mind this way and that, but mainly, I fear, from the point of view as to how much inconvenience it is likely to cause me if I accede to it.

A strange man in the room every morning would be rather a bore, for I am given at intervals to talking and singing to myself. I get up without reason (except my old one, that I loathe work) and find myself strumming on the piano I have hired from Warford. Sometimes I don't set to work for an hour or so, or break off after an hour at it and go out; but, with a man always in the room, I should have to behave, begin regularly, work steadily—in fact, half the pleasure of my morning's casual employment would go.

On the other hand, his presence might fix me at the book more sedulously, and I should get it sooner finished; there was that to think of. And he would certainly spare me some trouble in the way of copying, for my original working fist is a vile and impossible one, and the MS. as it stands at present will all have to be carefully rewritten by somebody.

And then, to do myself justice, I tried to consider the proposition more from the Christian point of view. The poor creature was very much down, the major was anything but well-off; it would, no doubt, be a kindness and a charity to both.

Only, so strangely are we compounded, I felt a certain amount of irritation and resentment that the major hadn't so put it that the offer of employment might have come from me. Then I should have been pleased with myself—and him, too—for giving me such an opportunity of showing consideration. Whereas, as the matter stood, I was annoyed with both.

"Well, sir," said the major, shortly, as though he were vexed at my hesitating, "what do you say?"

"Well, Major Ross, I'll tell you what I'll do; if you'll send your friend's specimens of handwriting to my rooms, I'll consider it and let you know."

"You won't find the fellow a nuisance," said the major, eagerly. "Strange as it may seem, the man's a gentleman. He knows how to behave, and won't speak till he's spoken to; or you can put him in another room."

"It isn't so much that," I replied, not quite truthfully—in fact, not truthfully at all!—"I'm only wondering whether I can really find him anything to do."

"Oh, you'll find him plenty to do," the major said, good-humoredly, taking me by the elbow and shaking it. "Why, when I had the pleasure of seeing your table, it was covered with papers like a paymaster's office. Tell me now, do you stay here all the summer?"

Whereupon I made the further mental note that the major was anxious to discover whether he was likely to procure Mr. Bundy employment and get him off his hands for a fairly indefinite period. So I cautiously answered that my length of stay was quite unsettled, and depended rather on the receipt of news from town.

Another not quite truthful statement (in fact, a lie, I fear), for, till the major's proposition, I hadn't had the remotest intention of departing from Thorpe before August.

Positively, when I follow the thoughts that pass through the mind of so fairly honest a person as myself, I am horrified to reflect on what treachery and deceit the soul of the professed knave must harbor. I suppose the difference between us mainly is that the one delights in expressing his roguery, while the other deploras and does his best to crush it.

We had been walking about the playground, and now stopped in front of the black barn at the end.

"Seen the racquet-court?" said the major, curtly. "Come in."

Inside, the rough old building was all whitewashed, with black service lines at the far end, and dingy marks of the india-rubber balls whose odor filled the place. Straw from the sparrows' nests hung untidily from the rafters. It was a long, narrow building,

with a broken school-form by the door, on which was lying an unspliced cricket-bat, with the string all loose.

I saw the major had something more to say, so I looked about me to give him time.

"By-the-way, you've met Miss Harewood, haven't you?" he began at last, in a curious, constrained voice.

I said yes, we had played tennis together at the Hall.

"She seems a nice girl?"

"Oh, very."

There was a pause, and then he went on, slowly, taking up the bat and looking it over: "Do you know, I can't help thinking she goes about too much alone with that Mr. Banquier. It's no business of mine, of course," he added, hastily, "but I must say I wish she'd some girl friend in the place; it would be so much better for her." He sighed, and replaced the bat on the form. "Don't you think so?" he added.

"Doesn't she know Mrs. Carlton?"

"Well, Mrs. Carlton's wrapped up in her baby, you know, and it isn't very amusing for her to walk about on the Green all day with Mrs. Carlton and the perambulator. She's fond of walking," he said, quite tenderly, "and that Mrs. Pearce won't move a yard if she can help it."

I ventured to observe, "If Mrs. Pearce is meant to be a chaperon, she's surely a singularly inefficient one."

"I'm not suggesting," replied the major, with some return of testiness, "that Miss Harewood does need a chaperon. I simply think it's not good for

her, nor for any young girl, to be so constantly alone with a young man."

I nearly said, "Well, it wasn't my fault, and that I didn't quite see what I could do to prevent it. Nor, for the matter of that, what concern it was of his."

The major turned to me and looked me wistfully in the face. "You seem a kind sort of fellow," he was good enough to say, "and you know quite well you wouldn't think it wise for a sister of yours always to be alone with the same person, even if they were definitely engaged to be married. Now would you?" he added, with something of painful entreaty.

I said, "No, certainly not."

"Then I tell you what I want you to do," he said, taking hold of my coat and fingering it, looking up at me eagerly, "I want you to interest that nice Miss Ryle in Fanny Harewood's behalf. I want you to speak well of her, so that Miss Ryle may wish to be her friend. I want you, so far as you can, to be Miss Harewood's occasional companion yourself. I want Thorpe people to see that Miss Harewood is not dependent only on Mr. Banquier's company. In short, I want you to be a brother to her, to treat her as if she were a young sister who needed advice and help, and—and—a brother's championship."

The old man's voice broke pathetically, and he added, shaking my coat, "Will you, eh? Eh, will you?"

I was very much touched by his manner and earnestness, and I said of course I would; I'd speak to Miss Ryle as we were going back home.

"Thank you," said the major, gravely, dropping

my coat; "I'm sure you will. Only don't let her know it comes through me, that's all."

"But why don't you make friends with Miss Harewood yourself, Major Ross?" I said. "You're close neighbors."

"Oh, I've done with making friends," the old man said, wearily, turning his head and looking out of the door into the sunshine. "I'm a disagreeable old chap, but I can't help taking an interest in young people."

"Well, then—"

"No, no. She don't want me. Besides, she'll be all right with Miss Ryle. That's a wholesome, unaffected girl, or I don't know one. She'll be all right with her."

He paused, and then he said, in his ordinary manner, "There, that's all I wanted to say, thank you. I am very much obliged to you; I needn't detain you further. Will you kindly tell Tom he'll find me in the farm-yard when he's done his game?" And with a stiff bow he left the racquet-court (as though, having got what he wanted, he were anxious to be rid of me), turned in at the farm-yard gate, and was soon lost in anxious scrutiny of the pigs.

Pondering on the major, wondering if once, perhaps, he had had and lost a daughter like Fanny, I went back to the *plateau* and delivered his message to his son.

Tommy was delighted to find I am going to play on Saturday. He says he'll bring down his Monday morning's Latin prose and get me to do it for him on the ground between the innings. He calls me "old chap," and says he hopes I don't mind; the fact is, he feels so chummy with me already!

We walked down the drive with Master Dunch, who was going to the other house (where the boys sleep) to attend to his aquarium.

We left him there, rather a cockney brick building, relieved only by the boxes of bright flowers and gay creepers crawling across the boys' wired bedroom windows. The butler was standing at the side entrance, engaged in coloring a new meerschaum, hastily pocketed when he saw us. Dunch wanted us to come up to his room to see his aquarium newts and drink ginger-beer (for the supply of which the butler has the exclusive contract), but the afternoon was growing late, and, tempting though the invitation was, we felt obliged to decline.

Dunch, fortunately, didn't fall a-weeping at our refusal. He lifted his flat straw hat gravely (the elastic causing his hair to stick out behind like a cockatoo's feathers) and then he trotted off down the passage, followed by the complaisant butler.

So I journeyed home to Thorpe across the fields with Miss Ryle and the doctor, the bright May sun westering.

What a charming, frank creature she is! What an amusing companion! She is full of observation and little imitations of cockney characters, drawn from Bayswater and shopping in Westbourne Grove; the people she overhears in the omnibus, the morose porter on the underground, the hansom cabby who says, "'Ere, missy!" in loud, shocked tones, when he only gets a shilling from the Marble Arch to Colville Gardens.

I put in all the good words I could for Miss Harewood. "You ought to see something of her, Miss

Ryle. She's charming," and so on, till I fancy Miss Ryle must have thought I was smitten myself. The doctor helped, too, by saying she must be pretty well boring herself by always being with that arch-bounder, Banquier.

To which Miss Constance replied, "Not if she's in love with him. No one's ever bored then, are they, Bobbos?" That was their *little language*.

As we crossed the Green we met the vegetarian ladies taking a depressed ramble together. Miss Barth was grasping a bundle of dying wild flowers and grasses; Mrs. Shine was glancing about sharply for some one to contradict and set right on points of diet and costume. The doctor is so frankly amused by them they have given over attacking him, and, not being quite sure of my reception, they amiably fell foul of Miss Ryle.

"My dear Constance," said Mrs. Shine, drawing herself up and looking like a lady out of *Struwpelpeter*, "what a frightful costume! How can your mamma let you walk out in it?"

"I should so much like to dress like you if I dared," said poor Constance, meekly, "but mother won't let me. She's so old-fashioned."

"We women have always been the slaves of something or some one," snarled Mrs. Shine. "Formerly it was men—"

"We have freed ourselves from them, mercifully," droned Miss Barth.

"Yes, we have freed ourselves from them," snapped Mrs. Shine. "Now there remains the tyrant fashion. We—all true women—must be up and doing."

"Constance," urged the doctor, gravely, "why ain't you up and doing?"

There was a pause, broken by a little titter of suppressed laughter from Constance.

"Well, we must get along in," said the doctor; "we've been out all the afternoon, and Constance is tired."

"Constance wouldn't be tired if she dressed rationally," remarked Mrs. Shine, with severity.

"I am never tired," droned Miss Barth; "I don't know what fatigue is. But then I eat proper things; I never suffer from the mental depression that meat gives. Now what do you suppose," she asked, turning to me despondently, "I have had for lunch to put me in such good spirits?"

I didn't like to suggest grass, like the unhappy Foulon, whose head, with his mouth stuffed full of it, was carried about Paris on a pike, the first vegetarian martyr; so I kept silent, and tried to look interested.

"Dried figs and hempseed, with plenty of oil!" (Now, would any one believe that, if I didn't vouch for it?) "And I never felt in such good spirits in my life!" she added, with the ghastly flicker of a dejected smile.

And off the two estimable ladies drawled, looking for all the world like Mrs. Shem and Mrs. Japhet, while the doctor indulged in one long loud yell of laughter.

"Kindly tell me," I asked, when they were out of ear-shot, "who is Mr. Shine? Is there such a person, or has she elevated herself to the rank so as to be above tenders of affection?"

"Oh yes, there's a Mr. Shine," laughed the doctor;

"I once met him. He's a solicitor, who eats enormous luncheons at the Holborn Restaurant."

"Do they ever meet?"

"Not if he can help it. He pays Mrs. Shine handsomely to keep away from him."

"And writes her affectionate letters, eh, deploring his loneliness?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"And Miss Barth? has anybody been known to come after her?"

"Miss Barth," said the doctor, "was once engaged to a curate; chap like Penley in the 'Private Secretary,' judging from his photograph."

"Why didn't it come off?"

"We-ell!" observed the doctor, cautiously, "to tell you a profound secret—which every one knows—Miss Barth's bit of money comes from a parent who was once a big draper in the Brompton Road. In fact, her income is still drawn from the business, and fluctuates with trade. It's sometimes so bad that poor Miss Barth don't get her usual doleful month's holiday at Herne Bay."

"And the curate found it out?"

"And at once cried off, like a chivalrous gentleman. The fact being—another profound secret!—his father was an ironmonger at Hull."

"What a wretch!" cried Miss Constance. "I'm always so much afraid Maud will end up with a curate. There's a little high-church creature comes after her now, with his head all on one side; only he can't make up his mind whether father means to give her anything, and he daren't ask."

"Funny thing," reflected the doctor, "the fascina-

tion the unbeneficed clergy have for young ladies, after the army. What's the explanation, you philosopher?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to say, doubtless the initiation into the double mystery, love and religion, at the same hands. But I didn't like to before Miss Ryle. *Maxima reverentia debetur puellis!*

As I went back to my farm to dress for supper at the Carltons', I met Ted of the forge in the village, bag on shoulder, on his way to a job. He tells me Ben, his assistant, is out of work, the forge being slack, and will be till the haymaking sets in regularly. When I ask how the wife and children live meantime, Ted says the neighbors in Bean's Row give them an occasional meal.

And then it appears Ben has the happy digestive faculty of being able to extract nutrition out of what turns most other people's stomachs. If a beast dies—sheep, or calf, or pig—the nature of the fatal illness doesn't seem to affect Ben, for he begs the remains of the farmer and feasts royally.

Meantime, he smokes in the happiest, laziest fashion, and I see his children, brown and healthy, running about with old hoops and bent biscuit tins, much merrier than little princes.

CHAPTER XI

SUPPER AT THE CARLTONS'—MR. BANQUIER CALLS —THORPE GLEANINGS—FANNY BY THE RIVER

WHILE at supper, Mr. Carlton tells me he has made Mr. Banquier's acquaintance and likes him. They spend evenings together, and read each other their works. He thinks very highly of the effort Mr. Banquier is at present engaged on, from which I diagnose that Mr. Banquier thinks very highly of Mr. Carlton's ditto.

"Most friendship is feigning." But for real, though possibly sometimes unconscious feigning, give me the literary.

Mrs. Carlton is mostly silent about Mr. Banquier. When she does speak, she rather damns him with faint praise. Clearly her woman's instinct (at which Mr. Carlton laughs vociferously) is at work.

But I don't judge Mr. Carlton to be very penetrating. Not many artists are; they can be so easily disarmed by admiration of their performances.

On the other hand, let me not suppose that I am going to see all, justly and without exaggeration. Mr. Banquier has made the same doubtful impression on me he evidently has on Mrs. Carlton, but we may both turn out to be wrong. Perhaps Mr. Banquier, when he detects our suspect views, will take special

pains to prove us so; for often our best efforts arise from our bad ones being scented in embryo. And there you have the explanation of the occasional nobility of action of the otherwise professional sinner.

I tried, judiciously, to discover Mrs. Carlton's views of Miss Fanny. She was rather reticent, and said she had seen very little of her lately. She saw much more of her in the early spring before they went up to town.

"I think she's got rather tired of us," she said, gently. Then she added, with mild disapproval, "She reads a number of rather odd books, books I shouldn't like to read."

"I suppose Mr. Banquier lends them to her?"

"I suppose so."

When Mrs. Carlton left us to go up-stairs and see that no one had carried off the baby during supper, we lit our pipes and I put a few discreet questions to the poet himself about Miss Harewood.

Not much use, for he's the type before whom a veritable *drame du cœur* might be played without his seeing any of it.

He considers Miss Fanny a very nice girl, and he supposes she and Mr. Banquier have fallen in love with each other, will be shortly publicly engaged, and married before the summer's over. Why not? But he confesses he knows nothing of Mr. Banquier's views on matrimony; only concludes they are those of all the respectable unmarried world.

Mrs. Pearce has a great liking for and confidence in Mr. Banquier (he has evidently flattered the foolish old woman), and, as every one knows, allows the

young couple to go about together as much as they please ; so, except for the major's odd watchfulness and her own good sense, the girl is left pretty much unprotected. It's all a fine field, isn't it, for a young man whose tastes may lie in wringing the trusting female heart !

There, that's my last word on the subject ; for the rest we shall see.

There was a tap on the hall door as we sat smoking, and to the cry of "Come in" Mr. Banquier entered. He was in a somewhat *flamboyant* smoking-suit, and had brought his pipe round to join Mr. Carlton. He was evidently surprised to see me, but shook hands with grave politeness. Then he sat down and fell to considering me covertly over the bowl of his cherry-wood.

Silence on the entrance of a visitor is always awkward, for it amounts to a confession that he has been under discussion. Mr. Carlton hastened to fill it by asking after his day's work.

"*Ça marche*," replied Mr. Banquier, laconically.

Then he turned his head condescendingly towards me over his high collar, and said, "I hear you've made it up with the major."

"Well," I replied, "the major has rather made it up with me, having, apparently, discovered he can make use of me."

"Ah, that tramp. The old gentleman was good enough to pay me a visit this morning, to know if I couldn't give him some copying. I said, flatly, 'No,' and showed him out. Why, I should go mad with a man in the room while I was at work."

"Oh, so should I!" added Mr. Carlton (who is

engaged, on a verse translation of the "Georgics"), not to be behind him in artistic sensibility.

"Fortunately, you see, my business doesn't matter. It's only a law-book, and will all have to be rewritten, some time or other, by somebody who can write more plainly than I."

Mr. Banquier gave me another look, as much as to say, "Fancy any sane person interesting himself in law, when there's all the wide domain of art!"

It was impertinent, but he's quite right. I wouldn't touch the thing if only there were any other subject I were capable of handling. Sometimes, in fact, I get so weary of its mere mechanism that I make up my mind to drop it altogether for a time and try my hand at a novel for a change. But I never get beyond the opening chapter, with a fine description of scenery in it; for when I try to make the people talk, they do it so monstrously unnaturally that my sense of humor comes to the rescue, the sheets go into the fire, and I'm quite relieved to get back to my *Weights and Measures*.

Still, I'm always glad to hear about novels, having devoured a good many; so I set to work to question Mr. Banquier about his book, to which he answered rather resentfully, as coming from one of the unenlightened, to whom he should never be able to make his large ideas manifest.

With such gentry there's but one way; to let them see you are familiar with Tolstoï, Dostoieffsky, Bourget, Zola, Marcel Prévost, and the rest of them, great and small. Then they conceive you are of the elect (so far as reading is concerned, at any rate), and begin graciously to expand.

I was just setting my little trick in movement when Mrs. Carlton joined us from up-stairs. Mr. Banquier rose to greet her with the forced smile of a man who knows he's not quite liked, and asked with false interest after the baby.

"Asleep," replied Mrs. Carlton, with a happy smile, and sat down to her work. "Well, what are you all talking about?"

"We were trying," I said, "to get Mr. Banquier to tell us about his novel, but he's shy."

An irritating little speech which had the effect I fear I meant it should, for "Not at all shy!" said he, giving me a haughty stare; "I should only be afraid of not being quite understood."

Mrs. Carlton hastened to ask him if he were playing in the match on Saturday, and he replied, "Oh yes, I suppose so!"—in the weary accents of a man who doesn't like being taken away from his work for anything so trivial.

Our conversation was rather languishing and intermittent, for Mr. Banquier plainly intimidates and silences the gentle Mrs. Carlton, so it fell to her husband to keep us alive.

He has an odd little humor which much tickles me, though I can conceive myself easily growing tired of it. He has read a large number of circulating-library novels, and, when he's alone with his wife, does scarcely anything without quoting appropriately from them.

If he gets up for the tobacco, he remarks, gravely, "He then rose to his full height, and with his nervous white hand reached for the heavily scented Latakia which, in the chagrin of his tortured,

sinful life, had been his constant solace and companion."

Then he continues: "Thrusting in the priceless weed with a gesture of impatience, he bit his nether lip till the blood flowed, and, clapping his feverish hands together sharply—"

"Really, Tom!" chides Mrs. Carlton, as she gives him a match, "if you go on like that, people will think you're mad."

To which Mr. Carlton, not at all disturbed, "She gave him a scornful glance out of her deep violet eyes, and, sinking back in the luxurious chair under the soft wax-light, languidly resumed her gold netting."

I don't think Mr. Banquier quite likes it, and laughs rather uneasily. Perhaps it is a reflection of his style, which old Mrs. Martin describes as somewhat Byzantine.

But nothing stops Mr. Carlton when the fit is on him, and when ten o'clock struck, and Mrs. Carlton rose to leave us, he remarked, "She just touched his marble forehead with her full red lips, and with the lithe movement of a panther passed out of the room, leaving the faint odor of *chypre* behind her."

As a matter of fact, after shaking hands with us, she simply pulled his hair for him.

We smoked for some little time in silence, and then Mr. Banquier turned to me again over his high collar and asked, "Going to stay in Thorpe long?"

I said I thought a month or so more, till my work was finished.

"And you?"

Mr. Banquier pretended not to hear, so I repeated

my question. He started from a sham reverie and replied, "I beg your pardon! Oh yes, I think I shall be here another month, at least—in fact, till my work is finished. When do you go up to town?" he asked Mr. Carlton.

"Second week in June. We're going up together for the first time since we've been married."

"Where are you going to stop?"

"My wife's sister has taken rooms for us off the Fulham Road. Nice and near the 'buses and underground."

It was the last word spoken for a long time, and the silence grew grim.

How strange it is, the variety of silence; its ease and then again its oppression. It didn't affect me, nothing does when I have a pipe, but I could feel that Mr. Carlton was suffering from it. My fault, for if I hadn't been there the two authors would have enjoyed themselves over their literature. I felt inclined to ask the poet to read us something, but the request would have sounded so bald and sudden that I fell to asking questions about Thorpe people instead.

It was characteristic of them both that, whereas Mr. Carlton had lived in the place a couple of years, he knew next to nothing but names and occupations, while Mr. Banquier, who had barely had a couple of months of it, had managed to dive under the surface and come up again with his mouth full of *trouvailles*, mainly, as such things mostly are, of an unpleasant nature. Mr. Carlton was constantly exploding with "I never heard that! That's news to me! How did you find that out?"

How had he found it out? how had he got it all together? by what patient questioning, observation, deduction?

Here were the Westons: to Mrs. Chick, quiet, respectable people; to Mr. Carlton, jolly farmers of the old English October-brew type; but, somehow, Mr. Banquier had discovered that Weston had drinking-bouts a good deal heavier than the mere excusable "market-merry;" that Mrs. Weston, before marriage, had thrown her bonnet over the mill; and that the aunt who had died and left them a bit of money had been of the disreputable-house-keeper order, living with a morose cattle-dealer somewhere in Lincolnshire.

The Poynders? Sir Arthur had been one of the wildest of the wild young men about town in the early days (he is over eighty) of her present gracious Majesty; had been a pillar of the old gambling-houses in Jermyn Street and the night-houses off the Haymarket; had run away to Scotland with his first wife and married her before Laird, the weaver-priest, and now lived in constant dread of being poisoned by his second, the Greek, for the all-sufficient reason that he spends his time devising new tortures for the unhappy old woman's soul and body.

As for John, the handsome young soldier son, nothing that Mr. Banquier can say is contemptuous enough—his stupidity, fatuity, crass ignorance; wherein I am not sorry to detect the spice of so natural and wholesome a feeling as jealousy.

Dr. and old Mrs. Martin; Mr. Kearsley, the clergyman; Mr. Ferrier; even the harmless, unnecessary

Vegetarians; he had some disagreeable revelations to make about them all. For him they were only human documents—detestable phrase!—and the more odiously he could score their records the more he felt their portraiture was complete. At the same time I felt (as one always does) that while drawing them so ruthlessly, in colors so black, he was drawing himself in colors even blacker.

In all his review of our small society, I observe Mr. Banquier makes no mention of Major Ross. Either he hasn't managed to scavenge up anything about him, or he won't tell us what he knows. All he says, and that truthfully enough, is that a man doesn't retire to a village and lead the strange life he does for no appreciable reason.

Also he begs to point out that there is no Major Ross in the Army List who could correspond to our major; which gives one furiously to think, as the French say.

When I suggest that possibly all the major does is to live in penury for the sake of Tommy and his future, he doesn't think it worth while to answer me. I dare say he's right, for I don't know that narrowness of means will altogether explain the old man's attitude towards us all. I wonder what he thinks he knows about me? how he explains my presence here with a law-book I can work at much easier in Paper Buildings? What a fine contempt he would have for me if he knew the truth!

It was striking eleven when we rose to go. Mr. Carlton saw us to the door, and I walked with Mr. Banquier to the entrance to the Redan. As we parted, for the first time he mentioned Miss Hare-

wood, and asked me to come in some afternoon to meet her and Mrs. Pearce at tea.

In the starlight I looked into his eyes, and could read nothing there but dark fatigue and indifference. "She's a very charming girl," he said. "Oh, I forgot! why, of course, you met her the other afternoon playing tennis. Good-night to you."

Something inscrutable and evil about the young man, and, for that reason, possibly, something interesting too. Perhaps, however, it's only because it's the first time I've really met him that I haven't altogether got his measure. I often find my imagination at work about people when I first meet them, forming sombre picturesque images, until they do or say something that reduces them to the most ordinary of lay figures. Indeed, the most striking at first sight are often the emptiest when you get to know them better; the explanation being, no doubt, that they are so satisfied with looking like something real that they don't care to take the trouble to become so.

By-the-way, Carlton tells me Mr. Banquier is a man of old family, an only son, with a widowed mother living in Guernsey, and a married sister in London. He was educated at Wellington and Jesus, Cambridge; took a fairly good degree and had some thoughts of the Bar, but has never gone further towards being called than living in King's Bench Walk, which accounts for my having seen him in the Temple.

He won the Chancellor's medal for his poem on "Cyprus," but frankly admits he's no poet, and has abandoned the art, for which judicious resolve Mr. Carlton highly commends him.

It seems you cannot better please an artist than by deserting his *métier*; partly because you leave the road freer for him, and partly because you tacitly admit his superior ability in the practice of it.

Friday Night.

I stood in the inn garden at the water's edge, by Marling bridge, as the last of the May dusk was falling. To the full pulsation of the nightingale as he throbbed in lonely ecstasy from the dark hill thickets, enchanted, I listened. Oh, the longing he raised in me, the delicious tenderness, the regret! His rich, graceful fluting, which is so far from being human, yet touched for me all the aching springs of my humanity, and my heart seemed swung on golden wires vibrating to his every liquid note.

There was no passion in it, only lofty, melodious grief, and then the grieving swelled to resignation, and higher still to joy.

Enchanted, I listened.

Yet I suppose it was only the sweet, cool dusk, the gentle river, the pure country sky that made the fluting seem to me divine; ah, and the evening peace, for the time, in my own heart. Music is in a man's own soul; if his nature be not in tune, all the dulcimers in the world will be harsh to him and jarring. Would it were always there in mine!

As I strolled back on to the bridge there was some one, a girl, leaning against the parapet, looking down into the stealthy water. It was Miss Harewood; the nightingale was singing to her, too.

She saw my white trousers, and turned to me as I came along the bridge.

"Meditating suicide?" I asked.

She leaned over the parapet and looked down upon the mother-of-pearl river, broken into oily swirls.

"How easy it would be, wouldn't it?" she said, softly.

So she turned to me, and, talking in the hasty, inconsequent fashion a girl employs when her heart's full of other things, we strolled back through Marling together. It was as though she were afraid, if she stopped, I should ask her why she was out so late on the bridge alone.

We talked a little of the cricket-match to-morrow, and of Miss Ryle (who had been to call on them), and then I asked if she were going to spend all her summer in Thorpe, and whether she didn't miss London in the season.

She said she wasn't very fond of London, except for just a visit. She had spent all last winter there, for her sins, in the Penywern Road, by Earl's Court station, and abominated it. Last summer they were at Dinan, in Brittany; very pretty, but rather odoriferous. They had an old house just outside the town, with a *perron* and firs all round.

And then the English colony there, who managed to make even the lawn-tennis malicious! Mrs. Pearce had quarrelled with them all in turn, and, as Mrs. Pearce usually did when she quarrelled with a whole society, declared there wasn't a lady or a gentleman in the place.

She supposed they would go up to town, however, some time before the end of the season, and stay with her cousins in Lower Berkeley Street for a fortnight. But I could see she didn't care much about

going there. She said her cousins never thought of anything but getting young guardsmen to their dances and meeting them in the Row; they didn't introduce her very readily, and tried to send her off to concerts instead of taking her to balls, and they patronized her clothes, and asked their mother before her face to give her new gloves. They called it being kind to her, whereas it was really only a sort of ungracious patronage.

Evidently the cousins were merely a trio of conventional, metallic, would-be smart young ladies, who thought Ascot was heaven, and would stand for hours at the meet of the coaches.

She would have loved them readily enough if they had only showed her a little more heart; for, now I get closer to her, I see she seems of an enthusiastic nature, very ready to like and to love; but the cousins were wrapped up in themselves, and their quasi-fashion, and their grotesque efforts to make a smart marriage, and those kind of people are never loved. How can they be, if they are unlovable? And the last to like them even, as a rule, are their relations; for, however successful socially, with them they are generally signal failures.

Cynic? Oh yes, of course; but then, you see, I know.

I asked politely after Mrs. Pearce, and Miss Fanny began to laugh at the discovery she had made that morning in Mrs. Pearce's purse.

She had taken it to the post-office to get some stamps, and found it contained (besides the usual keys, sticking-plaster, and specimens of trimming) cuttings from the newspaper of a cure for the cholera,

ditto for the influenza, the numbers of some missing foreign bonds and of a quantity of £1000 bank-notes recently stolen from a city bank.

Mrs. Pearce says you never can tell when a stolen foreign bond, or the cholera, or a £1000 bank-note mayn't come your way even in Thorpe; for instance, be given you in change at the butcher's. When they do, she proposes to be ready for them all.

In Mrs. Pearce I confess I didn't like to show too much interest, for, among the revelations of last night (notwithstanding her liking for him) Mr. Banquier had mercilessly included facts about her early history, too.

She had married, not very young, a raffish, racketsy captain of lancers, and after a period of extreme trial and discomfort had been driven to divorce him. Deprived of a wife's care (and nagging) the captain had dropped through the regulation, ex-military stages of wine and coal merchant. Those employments failing him, and for some few years entirely dependent on new matrimonial charity (for he had straightway married again), he had only recently been forced to make an appearance in the police-court as prosecutor against his wife (*ci-devant* boarding-house proprietress), whose bitter humor it was to beat the poor old man about the head with the tongs. He was a handsome old gentleman, with the venerable head and white beard of a minor prophet, and told so plaintive and judicious a tale in the witness-box of continued ill-usage, that the Hornsey magistrate could not do less than give the lady six months' real imprisonment in a real jail.

Mrs. Pearce heard of the sentence, according to

Mr. Banquier, with very mingled feelings; delight that the captain had been soundly beaten; anger and regret that another woman had done it; apprehension as to what might occur when the wife came out, whether she might not come and pay *her* a visit in Thorpe with the shovel.

Meantime the captain—still gay, bless him!—had, immediately on his wife's being safe in jail, broken up the Hornsey bower and fled, not unaccompanied, to the retired neighborhood of the Uxbridge Road.

Yes, indeed! there appears to be always some trusting female found ready on the spot to console your superannuated man about town. Sometimes it's *une ancienne*, who happens to be free; sometimes *une nouvelle*, who cheerfully discards her present obligations.

For the captain's sake! Irresistible, the British officer and gentleman—even in decay.

And now we were at the entrance to the Redan, and though I believe Miss Fanny would rather have gone in alone, on the chance of a word with Mr. Banquier, I went on with her sturdily down to her little gate. I'd the dim idea I was the better discharging, on the recommendation of the major, the office of elder brother to her.

It was just dark, drawing on for nine, and, except for No. 5, none of the little houses were lighted. No. 13's windows were wide open, as though the rooms were yawning after the labor of the day.

Miss Fanny's heart sank a little; I could tell it by the fall in the tones of her voice. It would have been something to know he was there, only just across the Redan. But it was all dark and silent.

Evidently Mr. Banquier is trying her, making himself missed. She let me know in a sad little fashion she hadn't seen him all day.

I can see she fears he is beginning to get tired of her, is keeping purposely out of her way. She fears she scarcely knows what; only she knows that, after the early feeling of security, she is beginning to doubt, to be miserable.

And yet all the way, till just as we got into Thorpe, she had been quite bright and merry.

How appalling is the power of dissimulation in even the frankest woman, and yet how necessary! I am amazed sometimes, at a London "At-home," looking round on all the people, listening to their chatter. There's scarcely a heart there, man's or woman's, that isn't wrung with grief and disappointment, and loss of one kind or another; there's scarcely a woman in the room who isn't acrid because she isn't loved at all, or not loved by the right man, or not well enough by him. And yet they cackle with quite apparent cheerfulness about the theatre and the pictures and their parties, as though their inner life had really no existence.

Heaven knows, I don't complain; I only think it wonderful.

Oh, love—love and desire! how many hearts are aching, throbbing, breaking this very moment as I scrawl these few lines.

Mrs. Chick looks at me as she clears away supper and says, with staid disapproval, "Writing again, sir?"

"Yes, Mrs. Chick, writing again."

Then she considerably suggests I shall get to bed

early, so as to be in good trim for the cricket-match to-morrow.

Dear me ! I forgot all about the cricket-match to-morrow, and I haven't had a bat in my hand for two years.

CHAPTER XII

OUR CRICKET-MATCH—MISS SOPHIA KEARSLEY—MAJOR ROSS, WHO SEEMS TO KNOW HER—MYSTERY DEEPENS—TEA AT THE POYNDERS'—MR. JOHN

WELL, we won our match. I was pretty well set, had got twenty, when that lumbering idiot Banquier ran me out. My fault, partly, as I had no spikes, only tennis-shoes, and couldn't turn very quickly.

The poor doctor got what he calls a *blob*—knocked out the first ball. Miss Ryle scored for us, and, while the doctor was being operated on, covered her face with her hands. She always does that till she's told he's got over his first ball. Then she looks up through her fingers—like people pretending to say their prayers in church—this time to see the unhappy doctor returning, utterly crestfallen, tearing at his glove with his teeth.

However, that isn't exactly what I was going to write about.

I was on my way to the post-office before we began, when I met the parson and his sister, Miss Sophia, who came last night.

Sophia! There's a wall-flowery, old-fashioned sort of Jane-Austen-Cranford name for you!

Miss Sophia Kearsley is a tall, pleased-with-herself-looking, eupeptic body of five-and-forty. She

rather suggests a respectable, British, unattractive Madame Dubarry; extremely well dressed, fresh-colored, with a great deal of white hair pouffed off her forehead. Altogether, I should say, a person who what is called "lives for society."

She evidently prides herself, too, on always saying just the right thing; a little mechanically, perhaps, as though a string were pulled for the purpose. The sort of lady who, when you leave one of her parties, smiles on you, presses your hand tightly, "*So good of you to have come!*"

Mr. Kearsley introduced me, in his *nunc dimittis* fashion, as though it were the dying effort of a long, well-spent life.

"We look to you to win the match for us," said Miss Sophia, graciously; "we hear you are a *great* player."

Not to be deficient in insincerity, I ventured to hope that Miss Kearsley was going to inspire our efforts with her presence.

"Indeed, yes! I see the first ball thrown and the last, and if Slatterley Marva—"

"Watterley Parva," murmured Mr. Kearsley.

"I should say Watterley Parva—how absurd of me, when I come here every year!—if Watterley Parva wins, I invariably go home in tears!"

Feeling a mixture of Sir Charles Grandison and Beau Nash, I replied that now I knew how much depended on our victory, my arm was indeed nerved. In fact, it was victory or Thorpe church-yard.

To which Miss Sophia answered, with a tuneless laugh, "Remember! we all look to you for *great* things," and with an *au revoir* rustled herself away.

When I got down on to the Green, where we had a small white tent with a toy flag fluttering on the top, Mr. Banquier was going through the same process with her.

"We look to you to win the match for us. We hear you are a *great* player," to which Mr. Banquier's only reply was to thrust forward his impassive, dead-white face and give her a weary, limp hand-shake.

He did it on purpose, of course; he likes to disconcert people when he first meets them, by which he wins himself a good many life-long enemies. But he is of the class of little boy you find in every school: he would rather be kicked than not noticed.

Now, in the course of the afternoon, when the Watterley Parvites were in and I was fielding long-leg, the major was standing near me (he had come round on purpose), and I was telling him over my shoulder that if he liked to send his friend Bundy round on Monday morning at ten, I was prepared to find him employment and pay him at the rate of a couple of shillings an hour for the morning's work.

"Capital!" said the major, and I had to run up to mid-off.

The major still stood there, looking on, while Miss Kearsley and her brother came strolling round the ground.

At the end of the over, as I was coming back to my place, I saw Miss Kearsley pass the major quite close at his back and look at him fixedly. The major paid no attention to them, and was evidently waiting for me to come back to say something else.

"You don't want the man to bring any paper or anything?" he asked.

“Oh no, he’s only got to bring himself,” and then I had to run in to meet a smack to leg from Wat-terley.

Back I came, and there was Miss Kearsley, who had stopped ten yards away from the major, on his right. She was saying to her brother, rather crossly, “But I am perfectly certain, Nathaniel!”

The clergyman murmured a reply, and Miss Kearsley went on, *staccato*, “Well, I shall ask him!” and, as I was going back to mid-off, I saw her walk resolutely towards the unconscious major.

I turned once in the course of the over (natural curiosity), and there were the major and Miss Kearsley talking together, and, as I came back, off they walked, not round the ground, but straight away from it, down the road that passes the Westons’ and ends in the gate and the path over the fields towards Mr. Ferrier’s.

Mr. Kearsley they left there forlorn, and soon away he strolled rectoryward, glad to be relieved from looking on, for I don’t suppose he knows a cricket-match from the Salisbury Missal.

Nor did I see any of them again till Miss Kearsley came down on the Green alone later, about half-past six.

‘*At last!*’ said I to myself, somebody who knows the major; somebody who can tell us something authentic about him. With a lady like Miss Kearsley—“a very tattling woman”—we should surely not be long now in arriving at the secret of his defiant attitude towards us all.

How pleased Thorpe will be! for our genteel world, besides being devoured with curiosity, is un-

commonly irritated with him for his balking stand-offishness, and will be delighted to learn the discreditable facts they are quite sure his silent past encloses.

It was about half-past six, then, as I say, when we had beaten Watterley Parva on the first innings and had gone in again to fill up the time, that Miss Kearsley was observed coming towards us alone from towards the rectory. The ladies were sitting on a bench outside the tent, and we gentlemen were lounging about in the usual cricket fashion at their feet. All conversation ceased when we saw her coming, and it speaks volumes for our self-control that we didn't all leap to our feet and run to meet her. No, we simply breathed hard, and looked with more than usual critical conscientiousness at the game. But the tension was terrific.

I was sitting on the ground nearest to her coming, and as she approached she called to me.

I rose, and "Which is Miss Harewood?" she asked me, abruptly. I said, "There, the young lady sitting at the end of the bench."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to introduce me?"

Miss Fanny rose as we came up, and I presented Miss Kearsley to her and to Mrs. Pearce. Somehow Miss Sophia seemed to me altered—more natural and sincere; as though she had dropped through the social crust (as a hot stone will drop through snow) down on to the bed rock of the eternal verities.

What could have occurred between her and the major to cause the change?

She paid very little attention to Mrs. Pearce, but

she took the pretty creature's slim brown hand and said, with a sort of kindly pathos, "I used to know your mother years ago. We were dear friends." And then, with a pleasant impulsiveness, she slipped her arm through Fanny's, and saying, "Come, let us have a little talk," strolled off with her round the grounds.

Mrs. Pearce looked her up and down through her long glasses, and turned again to the game with a small snort of displeasure. She would have said "Hoity-toity!" if only people ever did say such a thing. Clearly, she felt she had been neglected as an officer's lady, and further resented not being at once told, as the most important person in the place, all about Major Ross.

So the day came to an end without our being told anything, and Watterley Parva went home again, well beaten, in a break very much down on one wheel, blowing pipe-smoke in each other's faces; and Tommy Ross buckled his bat and pads together (to say nothing of his Monday morning's Latin prose done by me), while I went round with him to the Redan to find his father and say good-bye.

He told me, as we went, that a calamity had befallen Dunch's aquarium, for that Pontifex *major* had poisoned the lot with a bottle of cough mixture. It appears that, having taken a dislike to the aquarium from the first, he had poured the stuff in under the rather inadequate pretence that the newts kept him awake at night with their coughing!

The little house in the Redan was blank and empty; not even Mr. Bundy was visible, having gone over to Warford to see if he could hire a bed.

"*Non est inventus major*," I observed, "*O mi fili!*"

"That's rummy," said Tommy, a little distressed.
"Where can the old gent have got to?"

As we walked together towards the gate over the fields, on which Mr. Williams was sitting, smoking and waiting for him, we met Miss Kearsley and Miss Harewood, still strolling arm in arm, a little way off.

"Good-bye, Tommy," called Miss Harewood; "I'm so glad you got some runs."

Miss Kearsley said something to her, and Miss Harewood laughed, and cried, "Come here, Tommy; here's a lady wants to be introduced to you!"

Tommy ran up, and I followed slowly.

I was much struck by Miss Kearsley's expression. She seemed half to dislike the boy; half, as it were, to be afraid of him; as though he were barely convalescent from something she was afraid of catching.

"And you're thirteen?" she was saying, with her eyebrows raised rather disdainfully. Tommy said, "Fourteen next January," and Miss Kearsley let fall an "Ah!" with a certain sadness of intonation.

When I left them at the stile and was on my way to my rooms, there I met the major, outside the village, coming from the other direction. He was maundering along, with his hands in the pockets of his old shooting-coat. He looked infinitely harassed, melancholy, wistful. *Triste* exactly describes him. He scarcely noticed me, and when, as I passed, I said Tommy had been looking for him and had gone home, he merely said, "Ah!" as if the announcement weren't of the faintest interest.

Clearly, Miss Kearsley has brought a new element

into the place ; a disturbing element, too, as it seems to me.

Well, all I have to say is, that if she doesn't tell us all about it she's no lady. That I can feel already to be the general Thorpe opinion.

I forget what afternoon it was in the week—Thursday or Friday—I met Sir Arthur strolling morosely about. He stopped and spoke to me, and when we parted asked me to come to tea at the Hall on Sunday.

We met on the pleasant road between Marling and Bensing, and he took me off it a few paces to show me part of the old pack-saddle path that used to cross the country from the Norfolk coast, going into Wales, I suppose, and so round about to the western counties.

It was just a winding, narrow, leafy arcade—the hollow ground composted of last year's beech hedges—a glimpse into England of the Wars of the Roses, when all England, even the commercial travellers, knew how to ride. I looked to see some leper come stumbling down it, staff supported, the bell round his neck tinkling like the cattle's in the Engadine.

When I presented myself at Thorpe Hall the maid took me through the hall, paved with sunk lozenges of black and white marble, into her ladyship's sitting-room, where I found her ladyship at tea, with a rubbed old silver teapot and china from the post-office, which is also the grocer's.

Her ladyship and I were not long before we got on to Corfu. She had lived there as a girl (the daughter of a wealthy banker at Patras), and there she had met Sir Arthur when he was on the staff of

one of the last of our English governors of the Ionian Islands.

She was very much interested when I told her I had been in Corfu recently, and could give some account of its present aspect; how melancholy the old Government House looked, with its dejected statue of the last governor in front; how unkempt were the fortifications, how weedy the square where now the Greek regimental band plays, and how vividly yellow and black still the busy little streets with deep alternate sunshine and shadow.

Her large black eyes in her rather pinched, seamed, ochreous old face grew dim with wistfulness as she looked out across her neglected garden and thought of those happy days when the garrison dandies crowded round to dance with the beautiful Miss Makropoulos. She had a yet more beautiful sister, Zoe, married to a Greek marquis, and still living with him at Zante, when they aren't shaken out of their island by earthquake.

Sir Arthur soon joined us, smelling of teak, for he spends most of his afternoons, even Sunday, over fretwork.

"This gentleman knows Corfu very well," said her ladyship, looking up at him apprehensively, as much as to say, "You surely can't find anything to be angry about in that?"

Sir Arthur knitted his brows. "Ah, Corfu's a very different place now, since Gladstone thought proper to clear us all out of it. Were you shooting there?"

I said no, only staying a few days on my way from Patras to Brindisi, having had shooting enough in Egypt.

"Ah, but you should have had a shoot—plenty of snipe and woodcock. Some of the finest sport in the world over on the mainland in Illyria."

"Now I must show you my son's photograph," said her ladyship, suddenly, raising her unwieldy little figure with difficulty out of her low chair. "You have not seen him. I hope he will be coming here in a few weeks."

"Pish!" growled Sir Arthur, "what should he come here for, wasting his time? He's got his work at Sheffield; he's much better off there with his regiment than philandering about this wretched hamlet."

Lady Poynder muttered something below her breath—in Greek, for all I know. I guessed its interpretation to be that if her son came to Thorpe it was to see his mother, and not so disagreeable an old gentleman as Sir Arthur.

Then she brought me the photograph, dusting it with her curious, short, old hands.

"That's Mr. John Poynder," she said, looking over my shoulder, and smiling craftily up into my face. "Isn't he a handsome young man?"

A singularly, nay, an amazingly handsome young man, judging from the photograph; though, to be sure, photographs can be as unlike as paintings.

Not by any means, apparently, the ordinary, self-satisfied young soldier, satiated with cheap garrison-town conquests; but full of character, steadfast, with some notion of a career before him. The stuff the generals of division were surely made of in Peninsular days; a young Sir John Moore, the man who has always formed for me my ideal of the British officer and gentleman.

He appeared to be about eight-and-twenty or thirty, and in Peninsular days would, I dare say, have been by now a colonel, covered with medals and wounds and glory; needing now, perhaps, only a European war to bring him to the front.

To be ready, therein lies the real difficulty. Why, just think how many great reputations must have died unmade in the long European peace between '15 and '54.

All this I admit, judging only from the photograph. If only he didn't turn out to be stupid!

"He's just been made a captain," said her ladyship, with odd foreign pride.

"Well, what did you expect them to make him?" growled the delectable Sir Arthur, "a lance corporal?"

The old woman took the photograph and kissed it, murmuring to herself, while Sir Arthur turned to the table and poured himself out some tea.

And then, immediately, the idea flashed on me that this was the man Miss Fanny was really in love with. It must be so, surely, with that appearance?

Why, what an ass I had been, jumping so readily to conclusions! At once I began to feel easier in my mind; amused, too, that Mr. Banquier was so clearly being trifled with.

And yet suppose, after all, she should be intending to marry Banquier out of pique? that Mr. John didn't care for her, or were held in thrall elsewhere?

Pique makes almost as many marriages as money; marriages that turn out just as unsatisfactorily, too. Men and women marry as often as not from the wrong motives; the affair turns out a failure, and

then they abuse the institution. Can anything be more absurd?

"Come into my room," said Sir Arthur, curtly, "and have a smoke. You won't get any rational conversation here."

He led the way with his cup of tea, the bread-and-butter thrust into the saucer.

"I shall see you again," smiled her ladyship, waving her hand fantastically from her lips, "and we will talk more about Corfu."

And then she settled herself passively with the *Lady's Pictorial*, which appears to be all she reads, for there wasn't a book in the room.

Sir Arthur closed the door of his den carefully, and sat at the plain deal table, on which he had a sort of boot-jack screwed; on the top was a piece of teak with a pipe-rack pattern pasted on it.

The room was just a narrow slip, bare-boarded, with a few plain book-shelves, the lower part of the window shuttered like a Soho artist's studio. He sat down where the half-light was best, and sawed, and drank his tea, and sawed again with his irritating little fret-saw, till his shoulders shook, and his old mummified hand, with the large muddy veins, trembled.

I lit a cigarette and looked at the books. Somebody's *Farriery*, *Drelincourt on Death*, *The War in the East*, a few French novels of the *Fanny* period, and a good many odd little three-and-six volumes stacked together, of the date when authors were imitating Scott, and before the refreshing advent of Dickens.

"I wanted to see you," said Sir Arthur at last, "to

have a talk about what's going on in Thorpe. You know all these people better than I; you see a good deal of them, I believe, and can tell me something I want to know."

I sat down on a kitchen chair under the bookshelves and waited for more.

"I'd better tell you," he went on, blowing away the teak dust, "that when my son was down here before Easter he was very hard hit by that Miss Harewood."

"Ah, ha!"

"Fortunately, he said nothing to the girl; didn't even make love to her, I believe. Don't suppose he'd time, for when I saw what was going on, I pulled him up pretty short."

"And what did he say?"

"Usual theatrical nonsense. Told me he was hopelessly in love, had never been really in love before, and that, if he didn't marry her, should certainly never marry any one else. Well, that's all stuff, of course," growled Sir Arthur; "but coming from him I knew it was pretty well meant—for the time being, at any rate. He's not the sort of fellow who easily falls in love, though a good many women have been in love with him, I fancy," he laughed rather disagreeably.

"So you got him back to Sheffield, double-quick time."

"I pointed out that nothing whatever was known of the girl, that she practically hadn't a farthing, nor he either, and that how he proposed to continue in the regiment under those circumstances was to me a mystery."

"What did he say to that?"

"He was perfectly straight, as he always is. He assured me he hadn't said a word to her, and that he'd go back and try and forget all about it. 'That's right, John,' I said, 'go back and make up to a knife-grinderess, or a chemical-boileress, don't matter which, so long as she's got a pot of money, and then we can all go and live at Melcombe Bassett again, and turn out that rascally Northampton bootmaker who's living there at present.'"

"And he went?"

"He did."

"And Miss Harewood, how did she take his going?"

"That's more than I can tell you!" grunted Sir Arthur; "but she seems to have consoled herself pretty quick, don't she? It's just that I want to speak to you about in a minute. In the meantime I thought it just as well to try and find out something about her. They tell me her father was in the service, so I wrote up to one or two of my old friends in the Senior to see if they could post me with anything about him."

"What did you find out?"

"Nothing to the man's credit!" he growled. "It appears he was a gunner, major in the battery at Exeter in '76 or '77, and distinguished himself by running away with a tradesman's daughter he met in some country town when they were on the march up on to Exmoor. Levanted with her, sir, to Scarborough or Redcar, or somewhere of that sort. Levanted, the damn fool, as clean as a whistle, and deserted his wife and child."

"What became of him? Did he ultimately marry her?"

"Can't say what he did after his wife's death, but so long as she was alive she never would divorce him. Thought he'd come back, I suppose. Mrs. Harewood's been dead about four years, and, so far as my friend knew, Harewood and the other lady were still living together at Redcar. So, unless he changed his mind"—with another rather disagreeable laugh—"he was free to marry her then. Where they are now, nobody knows; it seems they've left Redcar."

"But isn't he dead? Miss Harewood is always called an orphan."

"So far as she was concerned, he was supposed to have died when he bolted. Oh, it isn't her fault, of course; she can't help it, but all that isn't very desirable in a daughter-in-law, is it? Especially when she's only got about a hundred and twenty pound a year to dress on. Marriage is out of the question if a man's in the service, as you know very well, unless the girl's got money."

"Now, what I want to know from you is this," Sir Arthur went on, after a pause: "Is Miss Harewood engaged to this Mr. What'sisname, the poet?"

"Banquier, the novelist?"

"Ah! or, at any rate, is she going to be? I suppose she was in love with John when he was here—most of the young ladies are!—but, like a sensible girl, has she got over it so far as to be able to marry some one else more suited to her, eh? As for John, why, we're one of the oldest families in the country, and if, with that appearance of his and the baronetcy, he can't manage to pick up an heiress, well, all I can

say is he isn't worth the trouble I took in breeding him. That's all!"

And Sir Arthur worked away so masterfully with his saw that he broke it; whereupon, like Peter in the high-priest's hall, he began to curse and to swear.

"Well," he said, looking up at me from under his shaggy old tufted eyebrows, while he picked out another saw from the paper packet beside him, "what do you say?"

"Well, Sir Arthur," I replied, touching my way cautiously, "what does it matter, if your son has got over his feeling for Miss Harewood?"

"But that's the mischief," growled Sir Arthur, savagely, "he hasn't. Lady Poynder had a letter from him yesterday, in which he told her he hadn't, and never could. Damn nonsense! He said Sheffield was killing him—it is a vile hole, I believe—and that unless he got away for a week or so he'd utterly break down. Well, of course, Lady Poynder wants him to come here—she'd give him anything he asked for; every girl in the place, if he wanted 'em!—but I won't have it, unless I can understand Miss Harewood's provided for elsewhere. And what I want to know is, from your own knowledge and observation, is she?"

"Upon my word, Sir Arthur," I said, "I don't know that I can answer the question. I'm the merest onlooker, and not in the least in anybody's confidence."

"Just so! but what do you think?"

"I always thought Miss Harewood was in love with Mr. Banquier. Now, after hearing your story, I shouldn't be at all surprised to find she doesn't care

a rap about him, and is only carrying on with him through pique."

"A girl don't often try to pique another man," observed Sir Arthur, sagely enough, "when he's out of the way, does she?"

"Oh, of course she would calculate on your son's hearing of what goes on."

"It would be all right, I've no doubt," Sir Arthur went on, knitting his brows, "if I could only count on John's keeping out of the way till something's settled between them here. But I can't, plague take it! He's a very curious fellow; it's the mixture of the Greek and English blood, I suppose. He has the English tenacity and the Greek quickness of feeling. If he makes up his mind to come back to Thorpe, he'll come, and I shall have all my trouble over again. You're not married, eh?"

No, I was not married.

"Then don't you ever marry a foreigner, especially one with Eastern blood in her. They're devils incarnate!" he glared, showing his teeth, the thick, jagged vein in his temple beginning to swell and throb tempestuously. "You never know what they're going to do next, nor what they're plotting against you in the next room. Twice has that fiend," he snarled, stopping to shake a knotted, trembling forefinger in poor old Lady Poynder's direction—"twice has she tried to poison me! poison me, sir, with some cursed, insidious Levantine drug! Now, however, she knows that in the event of my death I've left directions for my body to be opened, and that if poison is found in me she'll be hanged in Oxford jail as sure as a gun. That's the only way! frighten

them thoroughly, and make them remember they're in England. But it's a nice position, isn't it, for the head of one of the oldest families in the country not to know what next is going to be in his soup or his tea?"

He grew quite tearful, almost snivelling, and then he added, with singular bathos, in the tones of a man who tells you he's giving up his house and begs you not to mention it—"I say, this is quite between ourselves, you know."

Then he fell to sawing again, muttering to himself.

"John's the sort of fellow," he resumed at last, while I kept silent, "who never does anything behind your back. Whatever it is, he tells you he's going to do it—if it concerns you, that is—and whatever the objections, he doesn't rest till it is done. I know quite well what he'll do if he comes here and finds the young lady still free. He'll tell me he's tried to get over it and failed, and that he's going to speak to her. And he'll do it."

"Notwithstanding marriage may mean giving up the service?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" groaned Sir Arthur; "or he'll try and hang on in some filthy back-street lodging. It's all the most confounded nuisance, I know that, and I'm afraid I haven't been able to extract the comfort I hoped for out of you. What any man should want to marry for at all, by-the-way, except for money, I can't conceive," he said, fretfully; "I really can't."

A declaration that didn't carry much authority with it, I thought, seeing Sir Arthur had married for money, and owing to the failure of the Patras father-

in-law (some disastrous speculation in currants), was reduced to getting rid of Melcombe Bassett, his place in Worcestershire, and living in a half-furnished house in Thorpe. Another wrong motive and another failure.

When I left him, after promising to let him know directly I heard anything was settled between Mr. Banquier and Miss Harewood, I went to say good-bye to her ladyship. She was strolling up and down the terrace, wrapped in a dark-colored knitted shawl, shuffling along in felt slippers.

She peered at me, at first, as if she had never seen me before, and didn't at all like the look of me. Then a pale, uncertain gleam of recognition broke over her crumpled features, and she said she hoped I should come in again to talk about Corfu and see her son John.

And this is the end of the beautiful Miss Makropoulos, sometime heiress and *belle* of Corfu? and of the handsome, well-bred Sir Arthur Poynder, Bart., smart cavalry officer, and favorite aide-de-camp to Sir Fingal Barklay, K.C.M.G.?

"Lord! Lord!" as poor Ophelia cries, "we know what we are, but know not what we may be!"

CHAPTER XIII

A QUIET WEEK—LOQUITOR ROBERT BUNDY—GENTLEMAN BY BIRTH, SOLICITOR BY PROFESSION, TRAMP BY MISFORTUNE—OXFORD CITY—MÉNAGE À TROIS

It's a whole week since I've scribbled a line. Clouds have been over me, hay-fever, complicated with indigestion, making me loathe the touch of a pen, the smell of a pipe. And when I can't smoke I can't write even a journal.

For a week I haven't spoken a word to any one of my Thorpe friends; I have even made sharp turns and *détours* when I've seen any of them coming. I haven't cared to find out, even if I could, who the major is, nor what Mr. Banquier's doing, nor whether Miss Fanny's happier; nor, indeed, anything about anybody here.

The fact is, I have fits of dislike to my fellows, even sometimes my best friends. I know it's wrong, I deplore them, but I really can't help myself.

As for Miss Fanny, I can't say I've felt I've been altogether betraying the major's trust, for she's got Miss Ryle and Miss Kearsley to look after her now, and is, so Bundy tells me, constantly at the rectory. And if that won't keep her in the paths of rectoritude—I mean, rectitude—nothing else will.

Even Mrs. Chick and I have scarcely spoken.

Happily, she's a woman of a good deal of tact, and hasn't bothered me. She didn't even suggest medical advice, knowing probably that no doctor was ever known to do anything for hay-fever.

All she has said has been, with a sort of remote sympathy, "Not very well, sir?" while I have answered, "No, not very well, thank you, Mrs. Chick;" whereupon she has merely clicked feelingly with her tongue and let me alone, for which I am truly grateful.

So the week has been a quiet one, except for my obstreperous sneezing. Here we have it.

Monday.

First appearance of Mr. Bundy as copyist. He is neat and clean, well-shaven. The church-clock strikes ten as he knocks. I put him at a table by the window and give him some manuscript. There he writes without a word till twelve, only occasionally rising to ask me about something he can't read. At twelve he scrupulously cleans his pen and goes away with a quiet, respectful "Good-morning, sir."

In the afternoon I read and dozed over *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, full of vigor and oysters and porter, and the noisy rich talk that arises out of such. It strikes me as the work of a *bourgeois* Landor. After tea I maundered and groaned down to the river. A long and steady pull, which did me no sort of good.

Tuesday.

Mr. Bundy, who irritates me by his deliberate industry and unrelenting attention to business. I can't work myself, and I sit staring at the back of his

head, imagining his history. Either he will have to tell me his, or I shall have to tell him mine. I can't sit alone in the room with a man and not ask him questions, try and get at him somehow.

In the evening I took a long walk, and, bored to death, got a lift home in a cart. The driver, a young man with pretty blue eyes and a healthy, sunburnt face, was extremely drunk, driving a horse with new rope reins. He cursed and wept, the whole gamut of beer. He cried fearfully at the thought of leaving his mother, which somehow suddenly assailed him.

"Never would. *Nev-er would!*"

I wish I could get drunk like that and weep so bitterly. They say tears are a great relief.

We nearly drove over Miss Kearsley and Miss Harewood, taking a quiet stroll together. They seemed very surprised to see me in such company, holding on tight with both hands, to prevent myself from being jolted out.

Wednesday.

Mr. Bundy will drive me mad; he works the whole time. Unless I can induce him to idle occasionally and talk, I shall insist on his doing his copying at the major's.

Dark all day; superb evening; on the river as far as Bensing lock. My boat-keeper is ambitious after a house in the village, and what they call in America summer boarders. He says his wife is an hexcellent cook, really an hexcellent cook. Very odd; it's the only *h* I've heard him misplace. I fancy he thinks it's the right word.

Thursday.

I put a few questions, delicately, to Mr. Bundy about himself, which he answers without much hesitation. I think when he finds I am really anxious to be his friend we shall have some good long idle talks. And, upon my word, I don't quite know whether it's rank curiosity, or kindly, sympathetic interest.

For instance—"Yes, sir," says Mr. Bundy, "I am a Londoner."

A pause, while I nod encouragingly, being one myself.

"I was born in Torrington Square, sir."

"Oh yes, Mr. Bundy, I know Torrington Square, if only from driving through it on my way to Euston. Dingy, not to say black, Bloomsbury."

"Very black, sir," replies Mr. Bundy, and dreamily he adds, putting the end of the pen in his mouth and looking out of my little window, "we used to play in the square as children, and I remember the black used to come off on my cheeks when I put my face against the railings, listening to the organs."

He doesn't sigh, this rescued tramp; he simply looks out of the window and blinks his eyes.

"However, sir," he says, "I am not here to talk, am I?" and goes on writing, while I have so violent a fit of sneezing the thread of our conversation is lost. Aggravating man!

Friday.

Mr. Bundy a little shy to begin with, but on the whole talkative enough.

He confides to me that his father was an unsuc-

cessful Scotch engineer, and his mother a teacher of singing, known in her day as Miss Julia Raine.

Alas, Mr. Bundy!—for he looks at me inquiringly—I never heard of her.

She was very well known, however, and when she was younger used to sing at concerts and oratorios. Suppose Rochdale or Hanley has the “Messiah” on Easter Monday, or the “Stabat Mater” on Good Friday; well, if they couldn’t get Madame Lemmens Sherrington, they got Miss Julia Raine.

On ballad music thirty years old—*tempo di Clari-bel*, and Virginia Gabriel, and Miss Elizabeth Philp—you may still read, “Sung with the greatest success at all the popular concerts by Miss Julia Raine.”

Meantime (all day, apparently) his father, the unsuccessful engineer, sits smoking in the first-floor lodgings in Torrington Square, dreaming of bridges he never builds; of vast, vague irrigation schemes in the valley of the Upper Nile; waiting for Miss Julia Raine to come back from Hanley with the small change of her high notes.

Mr. Bundy doesn’t exactly describe him to me, but I can see his father for myself quite distinctly; a lazy Scotchman of eight-and-forty, coloring meerschaums, with a long, grizzling brown beard, and a dark velveteen coat and waistcoat. The Scotch character at its lowest expression of listlessness; no particular vices, only an absolute impotency of work.

The poor, hard-working wife’s weary singing-lessons are so often interrupted by the lodging-house servant coming to the drawing-room door. “Can I

“speak to you, please, mum?” Miss Julia goes wearily to her. There are whispers, and you hear the chink of coppers. The master wants some beer; he always has a glass of beer at twelve (behind the yellow-grained partition doors where he sits in slippers, smoking), and the velveteen waistcoat holds no money of his own.

So Miss Julia sings hard for him at concerts—oh, the meagre little concerts at Ealing and Peckham, to us who know only the St. James’s Hall and Richter!—and has pupils all the year and classes in the winter, winding up with the Cantata, “The Flower Queen,” just before Easter.

Almost Mr. Bundy’s earliest recollection is hearing the “Ah! ah! ah!” of the singing-scales rising from the pupils’ throats up into the nursery over the first floor. The pupils sang them, mirror in hand, to see that they opened their mouths properly.

As the swift years of Mr. Bundy’s childhood pass, further and further from her, slowly but surely, fade all Miss Julia Raine’s earlier ambitions. She is fast becoming—nay, has become—the mere musical drudge. She is growing very stout; the mouth droops discontentedly at the corners, her eyes are always tired. It is with difficulty now she can summon up the professional smile as she steps up on the dingy platform at Stoke to sing in the police concert. And yet once she was on the high-road to something more brilliant, or seemed like it; though, to be sure, most of the life roads to success begin by being pretty much alike for the first few milestones, don’t they?

And so ends this day, Friday.

Saturday.

Having at last got Mr. Bundy to talk freely, the difficulty I foresee now will be to stop him.

"Omnibus hoc vitium est cantoribus!"

I have to remember there are three children, three little Bundys, playing about in Torrington Square, frightening each other in the black hole where the gardener keeps his tools. The engineer moons about, paying ineffective visits in search of employment which he would be very much shocked if he were to obtain.

On Sundays he dutifully takes the children—Frank, Robert, and Ada—to the Foundling morning service. Miss Julia doesn't get out of bed till twelve, being far too tired with her week's work.

So the swift, monotonous years roll away, and the boys go to school in the Gray's Inn Road. They are good years and bad years—good, when pupils are plentiful; bad, when the pupils are perhaps just as numerous, but when poor Miss Julia is constantly asked if she minds waiting for her money.

Notwithstanding the ineffective but rarely unkind Scotch father, the sometime tightness of money, Mr. Bundy's childhood does not seem to have been at all an unhappy one. Miss Julia Raine, for instance, had many friends in the theatrical and operatic world, and orders for the play were not uncommon. They were mostly for the upper part of the house, but sometimes they were properly numbered dress-circle, when the engineer constructed himself a white tie; and in his velveteen coat and soft hat sat glaring

in the 'bus. He had (like most other unsuccessful people) a great notion of his rights and personal dignity, and was constantly being grossly insulted by strangers; either by their staring at him offensively in the 'bus, or treading on his feet on purpose, or pushing past him rudely on the way up to their seats.

The fact was, as he grew older I can see he grew cantankerous; dissatisfied with Miss Julia, too, who hadn't turned out quite the money-making machine he had speculated on.

There were two lines of Burns he was constantly quoting, something about "Mon's a soldier, and life's a fecht." So he was always "fechting" somebody.

The boys played about on Primrose Hill, at cricket on the Eton and Middlesex grounds (Mr. Bundy can still hear the reverberation of the bats and balls along the palings), and flew their kites in the Regent's Park. Soon Frank, the eldest, went into an engineer's office at Penge, and Robert, my friend, to a solicitor's in John Street, Bedford Row; while Ada was being finished off at a select establishment in Mecklenburgh Street, Mecklenburgh Square.

And then—alas! alas!—poor Miss Julia died. Courageous, indomitable woman, for years she had suffered from some dreadful internal complication.

Positively it's too painful, too touching, to write about.

I think of her, yearly growing larger, thrust into her tight, lesson-giving dress—sobbing her daily way, almost, through scales and *solfeggi*!—and then the torture swells and stiffens to unbearable agony,

and the doctor tells her an operation is her only chance.

But, my God ! where is a poor singing-mistress to get a hundred guineas from to pay for an operation ?

How good these doctors are ! The operation is done for nothing, and under stress of it Miss Julia drifts out of the musical world into one (let us pray) for her more truly harmonious. She is mostly unconscious ; the only words she whispers at the last are, "*I've done my best—I've done my best.*"

Poor, poor woman ! inexpressibly touching, final, most musical phrase.

The engineer drops a few scalding tears, parsimonious Scotch tears, while the children cry themselves sick—for they loved her!—and Miss Julia lies in Abney Park Cemetery, "for twenty-three years the affectionate wife of F. C. Bundy, Esq., C.E., of Clashmannan, N.B., and Torrington Square, W.C." You perceive the fellow's monumental egotism.

It is August 19, 1877, says Mr. Bundy, a very hot and breathless day, and the sunny side, their side, of the square is quite unendurable. Not much sea-side for people in that part of the town, and the windows are all full to see the funeral. Robert, the scribe and narrator, is in his twentieth year, Frank is twenty-one, and Ada eighteen.

And now they must make a move, for, Miss Julia gone, they no longer can afford Torrington Square. The green-grocer's van is summoned, and away they trudge, house-ridding, down to a dismal little semi-detached nest in the Talbot Road, Bayswater. There they make the best of their first-floor furniture, while the engineer, stoutly declaring that "mon's a soldier,

and life's a fecht," scans the advertisement columns, and for a fortnight goes daily into the city, third-class underground from the Queen's Road, "fecht-ing" desultorily for employment. But, gracious me! who wants a cantankerous Scotchman of fifty-five, who won't undertake anything less than the building of an enormous bridge, over which he spends all his evenings, adding the calculations, making the resistances, and so forth. All very well as the crowning work of a busy life of constant employment, but as a mere phantom (after years of sheer, canting idleness) what guarantee does it afford of stability even?

So the elder Bundy soon falls back on his old laziness and sits in slippers all day, smoking and reading Scott's novels. He even talks of engaging in "leclerature" himself, as an easy means of earning a few guineas. Did not Cervantes, he asks, write *Don Queexotte* just about at his years?

As for Ada, now that she is eighteen and finished, she goes into Mr. Whiteley's establishment, and in her well-fitting black dress and broad white collar helps imposingly and sedately at the glove counter. She is a cool young person, of a fine figure, fair complexion, and soft hair of an attractive Titian tinge of red. She says she is quite determined of one thing: she's not going to make a fool of herself with anybody. Temperament—what a blessing is a calm temperament! how often it's mistaken for virtue!

The engineer speaks of her affectingly as the one support of his old age, and looks forward breathlessly to the day when she will make a good marriage and take him into her house for the rest of his days. He

says he "rally deserves it," after all his privations, and all he did for her in Torrington Square. All he ever did, by-the-way, was occasionally to hear her her French :

"Viens, mon coursier, noble ami du Cosaque."

And such is the power of the will in adroit female hands that, within six months, the resolute Ada marries one of the travellers—steady, energetic, elderly Mr. Floyd, in receipt of five or six hundred a year; after whom all the more sensible of the young ladies in the different departments had long been racing—Ada defeating them finally by a nose, as one may say, since that was one of her most love-provoking features.

And with Mr. and Mrs. Floyd the engineer retires to Stamford Hill, and, for all practical purposes, out of my friend Robert's life they pass forever.

They might, surely, have done something kind and helpful for him, but they never really did; never will now.

It is true that when the more serious of his distresses come and he ventures, once only, to appeal to Ada, it is true she sends him something; but there is a way of doing such things, isn't there? There can be such an unkind way of doing kindnesses.

"She might have known I wouldn't have asked if I hadn't been starving," groans Mr. Bundy, his fists in his hair.

She wrote a perfectly sensible letter, pointing out his age and what he ought to be doing, referring copiously to her own family and its expenses, and ending with the hope it would never occur again.

Nor did it. It was left for the major to lay more kindly hands on the derelict; to bring him, with a sort of savage lovingness, into something approaching a haven at last.

What a crop of rank misery springs in the great gulf that yawns between sensitiveness and passive unkindness—the brother who can't bring himself to ask, the sister who won't offer. Ada sheltered herself behind her duty to her husband and her children. Perfectly correct, of course, but that isn't Christianity.

How amazingly little true Christianity is understood! Sometimes I think the only legitimate descendant of the cross to-day is that Tolstoi whom men now call mad.

Let me haste forward, however, or my hand will weary before it can even trace poor Robert's dark trajectory.

He was still with his solicitor, living in one old panelled room in Great James Street, hard by Bedford Row, when his elder brother Frank, weary of the office at Penge and the exiguity of the life-circle his compasses could trace on office paper, determines for the stage and Sir Henry Irving's position thereon when he vacates it.

Lonely Robert Bundy, out of his articles now, and a clerk at thirty shillings a week; the mother he loved dead; his father snug and warm and distant at Stamford Hill; his brother sometimes in work, more often stranded with his dirty theatrical-luggage baskets in some country town, with no money to pay his landlady and go look for another engagement; always, after some experience of Ada, applying to

Robert for help; his prosperous, rustling sister always doing her duty, always, as she says, glad to see him, her gladness mostly mingled with surprise and disfavor when he ventures to come—poor lonely Robert, having brought him so far, let him tell his story his own way.

But here I had so violent a fit of sneezing that Mr. Bundy took upon himself to wonder I didn't do something.

He rose, for it was striking twelve, and respectfully recommended me change of air till Monday morning. Why not try Oxford, where there surely couldn't be so much pollen flying about as in Thorpe.

"Well, Monday at ten, at any rate, Mr. Bundy," I snuffled.

"Monday at ten, sir—yes, sir—thank you, sir," said Mr. Bundy, and bowed himself respectfully away. Then I suppose I shall hear the remainder of Mr. Bundy's story.

So, for change of air, I took the steamer from Day's lock for Oxford.

Hopelessly dull fellow-passengers, all of them. Melancholy husband and wife; wife says, feebly, "There's a barge, do you see, George?" and they both stare at it till it passes. A girl in spectacles works at a stocking; I admire her courage in putting them on publicly. Fearful man with river panorama comes to ask fearful woman how she is getting on. "Naicely, thanks!" As for me, I read *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, and keep up my character for superiority.

Opposite the college barges, the hour nearly seven,

university youth plunging off the rafts and lunging across the brown, tepid water, upsetting themselves, for pure joy in the golden evening, out of canoes and dingies. Oxford city, gray and cool in the twilight. I drove up in a hansom just in time for dinner at the high table with the Dons and the drinking of '63 port afterwards in the common room.

Sunday night I spent with a young couple who are living in rooms for the summer at Culford.

What odd households there are, wherever you go, even in peaceful farms, covered with wistaria, and the grapes already beginning to think of their bunches along the front and over the door. There was such a one next my friends' rooms.

Ducks and fowls, cherry-trees, and a huge creaking pump—every country sight and sound; and inside a *ménage à trois*, a broken-down hotel-keeper and wife, and a shady solicitor friend, with vicious, ragged, gray whiskers, and a straw hat as battered as his face.

As the bells were ringing I saw the husband conducting the friend *Alphonse* to the farm-yard gate, pointing him the way to church—*Alphonse* having dressed himself in seedy black with a thin, tall hat, looking altogether like an imposing type, a horse-leech from Aldridge's. With this select company they tell me the parson comes and dines occasionally, and guffaws over a pipe and whiskey-and-water in the kitchen.

There's a very pretty girl there (really uncommonly pretty) staying on the farm; some connection of the bold, handsome, big-boned wife's—maid and nursery-governess combination, on a holiday—

and her the parson desired to question about her religious condition ; but she, with the unerring feminine instinct, straightway scented the absence of the monk under the hood, and would have none of his palaver.

“ Jacynthe, my child, thou art right to go hide in the orchard. Fill not his reverence’s pipe ; touch not with thy sweet pink lips his reverence’s glass ; ‘confess not thyself to that black and scowling phiz !’ ”

CHAPTER XIV

THE ODYSSEY OF ROBERT BUNDY

ALL the morning, while Mr. Bundy was talking, there was a wandering piano-organ in Thorpe. All the sweet blue-and-white June morning I heard it rippling and rattling about the village, now near, now far; now loud with its "Czarina" schottische, now faint with the honey-sweet *intermezzo*. It was like the music in the theatre, heightening the drama of the recital.

"I first met my wife, sir," says Mr. Bundy, "down in Bayswater. I had a friend down there from the office, and one night, when I was coming home along the Cornwall Road, I heard a dog barking and a scream. I ran up, and found a young lady in distress about her terrier, which was fighting a cat down in the area. I went down and brought the dog up, and the young lady and I became friends. After that we often met, and soon we became lovers.

"She was about my own age, and her name was Florence Harper. She had had a very hard life, and was then earning her living by sitting to artists and giving lessons on the piano. Yes, sir, she lived quite alone, like I did. She had a few pupils, and with that and her sittings just managed to make both ends meet.

"The year I married her, in '81, her picture was in the Academy, painted by a very fine artist. Perhaps you may remember it, sir? She is sitting on a bench in a wood, dressed in a lace fishoo, reading a letter, with dead leaves on the ground. It was called 'The Last Leaf.'

"Well, yes, sir, it's a good while ago, but it was very favorably noticed, and I really think it was one of the best that year. Many of the papers said so, so I thought you might remember it.

"We were married at Easter, '81, at the registry-office in the Talbot Road. Flo told me all about herself first. She never kept anything back from me—not until later, that is.

"How could she help it? You see, sir, her father was a real bad un. She told me straight out, when I asked her to marry me, he was in prison. He had been in business in the city, was doing very well, but he took to bad ways, drink and women. Oh, he used to beat her mother cruley! Why, one night he came home drunk and turned her out of the house at Dulwich, and kept her there in the garden all night in her night-gown. So Mrs. Harper left him at last, and took the younger children with her. She went and lived out at Hammersmith, but Flo remained with her father, for, bad un as he was, she was very fond of him. She and her mother never got on.

"After that, he gave up the city altogether, and used to live by getting money out of a widow he promised to marry when Mrs. Harper got the divorce she was going for. But when the divorce was got, Mr. Harper kept putting the marriage off, and the widow, Mrs. Platt, found out there was somebody

else, and at last she prosecuted him for writing her name on a check.

"Yes, sir, he was tried at the Old Bailey for forgery, and got five years. Flo was in a dreadful way; she saw to everything, and scraped up the money to get Montagu Williams to defend. Mrs. Harper wouldn't help with a farthing. And Flo told me she'd akshally invented a plan and paid two men to rescue her father as he was driven from the police-court on remand in a cab. They were two bricklayers, and were to stop the cab; but though Flo was ready with another, the men never turned up. They took her money, and she saw her father drive past and thought she should go mad.

"Her bit of a home was broken up, and she'd nowhere to go. Her mother had married the barrister who got her divorce, and refused to let Flo come there. She sent her a trifle, and she'd a trifle left from the furniture, so she took a room in the Lansdowne Road and began to sit as a model.

"She'd beautiful hair, sir, and used to sit to Royal Academicians and other gentlemen. But it was a hard life, and she was very low at times, and often tempted to do wrong. Her father had been about a year in prison when I met her, and five weeks later we were married."

Faintly steals into the room the piano-organ, playing one of Chevalier's songs. Not another sound in the village of Thorpe. Not a sound in the house, nor out of it, except the creak of the pump and the click-clack of Mrs. Chick's pattens on the cobbles under the veranda.

And my thoughts wander to Mr. Bundy's wedding-

day—the lunch in the Italian restaurant in Westbourne Grove, the afternoon spent in cheap seats at St. George's Hall, the dinner in Oxford Street, and the walk home to the ancient, panelled Great James Street rooms under such stars as the London sky affords.

At last they are alone, that lonely man, that lonely girl. Had the old Stuart house ever mutely witnessed a stranger, more touching bridal? Many, I suppose, but how unrecorded they have passed away!

And then, far down the road, from behind Bean's Row, a cock crows, hoarse and belated. It seems to crow a challenge to Mr. Bundy, and he resumes:

"Well, sir, we kept on living in Great James Street, just taking another room. It was near my work, and the 'buses in Theobald's Road were handy for my wife and her sittings. We did pretty well to begin with, well enough till I lost my place. It wasn't my fault: one of the partners died, and they made a complete rearrangement in the office, and I had to go.

"I did all I knew to get work, but for eighteen months I was out of what you may call regular employment. I'd odd jobs now and then, which just about kept us from starving. I was booking-office clerk for a time on the underground; I sold boots for some people in the city on commission, but for eighteen months our average money was only a few shillings over a pound a week. No, sir, there was no baby, fortunately.

"Well, my wife did apply for help once or twice to her mother, when we were really hard pressed, but she refused to do anything. Once she wrote to her

mother's brother, a rich man, a clergyman in Shropshire, who'd once been kind to her when she was living alone, but this time he never answered the letter.

"At last, sir, just as I was getting a bit desperate, rather a strange thing happened. Flo had had a friend at Dulwich, a Mrs. Thwaite, whose husband was a rich man, and of whom she'd quite lost sight since they all left the place. My wife met her one day by accident in Baker Street, and found she was a widow now, left very well off. She'd two children she hated as she had hated her husband. I've noticed, sir, mostly, that if a woman doesn't love her husband she doesn't love his children either."

"Very true, Mr. Bundy. There's a vast deal of nonsense talked about the instincts and deep affection of maternity."

"Well, sir, Flo went to see her as she was asked. Mrs. Thwaite was young, tolerably good-looking, and what they call ambitious. She'd suffered a good deal from her husband, I believe, and she didn't care about being hampered socially with his children. She'd got rid of the elder one, the girl, whom she'd sent away to a convent in Brittany, and she told Flo that if we'd take the little boy she'd pay us so much a week, and increase it as he grew older. So we took the little chap, Dicky Thwaite, who seemed very glad to come to us. I loved that boy, sir, and so did my wife. I'd give a good deal to see him again. Why, sometimes, sir—" and Mr. Bundy heaves a long, long sigh.

"And Mrs. Thwaite, what became of her?"

"She took a small house in Sloane Street, sir, and

bloomed out as a fashionable young widow, without encumbrances, and something like two thousand a year. Married again? Dear me, yes, sir; married almost immediately the Honorable Robert Sneyd. Many's the time I've seen her name in the papers as looking very well dressed at parties and at homes."

"No, Mr. Bundy, I never met her. I should like to, and ask across the table, during a pause, after her children. And where did you all go to live? The whole world was before you, wasn't it? For I don't suppose Mrs. Thwaite cared particularly where you took her child.

"Not a bit, sir. She only said that perhaps on the whole she preferred the little boy wasn't in London. The country was so much healthier for children."

"Oh, ah! fresh eggs and new milk. Thoughtful mother! Well?"

"Well, sir, after a while, at the beginning of '84, we went to Brighton. I was lucky enough to get a berth there in a solicitor's office. We'd a nice little house in Pennington Street, nearly opposite the aquarium, and for four years were as happy as possible. Ah, those were far and away the happiest years of my life, sir. We'd plenty to eat and drink and pay our way with; the little chap was growing up nicely. He went to school in Sillwood Place; I used to take him there every morning regular on my way to the office. Those were happy years!"

"And your wife? Was she doing any sitting or teaching all that time?"

"No, sir. She looked after the house and the

boy, and after he began to go to school she took to writing."

"Novels?"

"Stories, sir, for the *Ladies' Novelette*, and the *Girl's Herald*, and *Cheapside Bells*. I dare say you've seen such papers, sir, on the book-stalls?"

"Dear me, yes, Mr. Bundy. 'The young earl looked at her out of his unfathomable blue eyes, and, seizing Lady Isabelle by the gloved wrist—'" And Mr. Bundy, for the first time since I have known him, gives a melancholy laugh. "Well, that sort of literature pays very well, I believe. It must have made a considerable addition to your income?"

"Ah! what did we want," cries Mr. Bundy, almost fiercely, "with an addition to our income? We'd more than enough to eat and drink, we always paid our way, we were happy—at least, I was. What can people want more than to be happy? Sir, I do curse the hour," he cries, savagely, "when my poor wife took to writing about earls and countesses and splendid houses and horses and fine carriages. It was dabbling in such nonsense made her want something better than Pennington Street; drove her, I believe, to do what she did. It was writing so much about rich people first put the idea into her head of how to be rich herself, at whatever cost.

"Oh, I dare say it was all partly my fault," says Mr. Bundy, in tones of ineffable sadness; "I ought to have pushed more in the office, tried harder to get on myself. Flo was always at me about it. But you see, sir, I'm not one of the getting-on sort. Give me enough to eat and drink, and a pipe to smoke, and

I'm perfectly happy. And so would my wife have been but for her writing."

"Not so, Mr. Bundy; depend upon it, the germ of discontent must always have been there. Inherited, perhaps. Who can tell? The Brighton atmosphere, I dare say, fed it. Those opulent squares and houses, the carriages and riding-horses along the front, the smart November crowds in furs and astrakhan—why, it must all have been like the steam of a cook-shop to the starving man. There are certain appetites that must be fed, no matter what the restraint or cost."

"Cost?" echoes Mr. Bundy, bitterly—"cost of honor, of peace, of all that makes life bearable? Is there any satisfaction in the world worth that? Look what it's all driven me to!—a beggar, a tramp, a toe-rag commercial. And my miserable wife—whom, in spite of all her follies and crimes, I love—a fugitive from the police!"

And Mr. Bundy puts his head into his hands and groans, chained, Prometheus-like, to a dolorous past. . . .

So far I had written in my journal, and then:

"Heart of me, head of me, cold as a stone,"

I got up and went out. It was very late for Thorpe, and I had to unbolt and unlock the front door. The Chicks had gone up to bed as usual at ten.

Outside in the lane the night seemed green, the moonlight was so mystic and so tender. The dim oval moon hung balanced on a dappled lawn of cloud,

like some monstrous enchanted egg. It was one of those summer nights astray from autumn, when all the world seems yielding a last, long sigh of dying, vaporous regret.

There were one or two bedroom lights in the village, but mostly all was dark as I strolled through and round by the church. From Bean's Row I heard the creak of the pump, and far away the faint bark of a dog.

I was bareheaded and in thin pumps; the Green was so dewy I turned off the grass into the Redan. Not a light there, except at the major's upper window.

I sat down in the dense shadow under the elm, and, too tired to think, just laid my head back against the trunk and closed my eyes.

I must soon have fallen into a doze, for I was conscious of nothing till a voice said softly at my elbow, "Frank!" Then Miss Harewood repeated it, laughing slightly—"Frank! Are you asleep?"

The first woke me, and at the second I knew whom I was mistaken for.

I turned my head the other way, and, bending and rubbing my eyes to give her time to recover, said, naturally, "My goodness, I fell asleep! I say, Miss Harewood, don't you tell the major I've been using his seat at prohibited hours, will you?"

She stood there silent; wondering, I suppose, whether I had heard her lover's Christian name.

Then I looked up laughing, and added, "I beg your pardon. Do come and sit down, and have a little modern midnight conversation. It's not so very late, is it? and I haven't seen you for an age."

I moved up, and she came and sat obediently beside me, searching my face.

"I've been scribbling the whole evening," I said, "and thought I shouldn't sleep unless I came out and took a stroll. The result was I fell asleep at once. Tell me, how are all our friends in the Redan?"

"We haven't seen you since the cricket-match," said Miss Harewood. "What's become of you?"

"Oh, I've had hay-fever and bad temper, so I've just kept out of people's way."

"Are you better?"

"No more bulletins will be issued."

Miss Fanny laughed, and I went on, "Well, what have you been doing with yourself? Playing any tennis?"

"Once or twice. We thought you'd have come."

"I'll come to-morrow, if I may. Have you seen anything of Miss Ryle?"

"Oh yes, several times. She plays so beautifully."

"And Miss Kearsley, have you seen her?"

"Yes, often. Wasn't it strange her knowing my mother?" she said, moving a little uneasily.

"You don't want to go in just yet?" I asked. "It's rather improper, but everybody's asleep. How's Mrs. Pearce?"

"Snoring," said Miss Fanny; "she shakes the whole house."

"And how do you like Miss Kearsley?"

"She's very kind," Miss Fanny replied, evasively. "She seems very anxious to be friendly. She's always asking me up to the rectory to tea."

"Do tell me, where used she to know your mother?"

"At Exeter, years ago, when I was quite a little girl."

"You don't remember her there?"

"Not in the least. We left Exeter when I was three or four."

"After you lost your father?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember him?"

"I can just remember some one tall, in uniform, lifting me in his arms, and I can remember trying to draw his big sword. And that's all; I can't remember his face in the least. Isn't it funny the things we remember as children, and the other things, so much more important, we forget? What's the first thing you remember?"

"Being tall enough to see the top of the nursery table, and the wonderful view of the plates and knives set out for tea. I thought I'd grown up into another world, a sort of Table Mountain."

"How absurd!" she laughed, and settled herself more comfortably in the seat. "Isn't the night beautiful?" she sighed. "It's like one of Doré's illustrations to the *Idyls of the King*, when Lancelot is riding up to the castle."

We were both silent for a time, and then I said, "Did you go to live in London after you left Exeter?"

"Very near. We had a house at Norwood, and lived there for years."

"Excellent opportunity for studying the Crystal Palace!"

"I know every inch of it, and every inch of the grounds," she said, "and that smell of buns and pork-

pies from the refreshment-rooms. Don't you know it, and the buzz of the great organ?"

Miss Fanny laughed a little again, and then, after a pause, I asked her, "You went to school at Sydenham, I suppose?"

"No, in London."

"Prince's Square, Bayswater, by any chance?"

"How did you know that?" said Miss Fanny, astonished. "It was in Prince's Square."

"And you used to go and stop from Saturday to Monday, I imagine, with a girl friend's people, and go to the play?"

She laughed, and said, "My great friend lived in Queen's Gate, and on Saturday afternoons we were sometimes allowed out alone to the German Reeds'. What *do* you think? We used to start off in a cab for the St. George's Hall, and as soon as we got to the Albert Memorial make him drive to the Haymarket or the St. James's. And we used to tell such stories when we got back."

"Nice girls! Nice, open, frank English girls!"

"It was very wrong, wasn't it?"

"Shocking! What's the matter?"

"Oh!" said she, "how that frightened me."

It was birds in the elm, fluttering and chasing each other among the leaves. They did it in silence, half drowsily, as though they were flying in their sleep.

"Well, did you finish your education in Prince's Square?"

"What a lot of questions you ask," she laughs.

"I'm practising, in case I ever get a brief."

"When mother died," she said—and at the word

"mother" her pretty voice dropped rather, as though it were a painful effort to pronounce it—"they sent me to school for a year in Paris."

"*Avenue de la grande Armée?*"

"Wrong, this time. *Avenue de l'Alma.*"

"Did you have good fun?"

"Oh yes, great fun. Only they wouldn't let us go to the theatres except when the Daly company came and played Shakespeare."

"So you didn't go near the *Chat Noir*?"

Miss Fanny laughed, and said, "No, but I had a great friend named Sophie, who was a Pole, and lived in Paris, and she'd been often with some artist friends."

"So she told you all about it, eh?"

"Now I'm not going to answer any more questions," Fanny said; "I'm going to question you."

"Rather than that," I answered, "I'll volunteer a statement." I sat up and turned to her confidentially. "Do you know, I went to tea at Thorpe Hall on Sunday—or Sunday week, rather."

She was silent for a minute, and then she asked, dreamily, "And how were they?"

"They were very well and quarrelsome."

"I suppose Lady Poynder did nothing but talk about her son, Mr. John?—Captain Poynder, as I hear he is now."

"She showed me his photograph. If he's at all like it, he's one of the handsomest young men I ever set eyes on."

"Yes, he's very handsome," said Miss Fanny, "but oh! he's so dull. You can't get a word out of him; he'll be with you for hours and never utter. And

he's so stiff in his legs; he wants jointing, like ribs of mutton. He walks all in one piece, as it were. He's exactly like an extremely uninteresting Greek god."

"You know he's very much smitten with you?" I ventured.

"Oh, I dare say he thinks he is!" she replied, scornfully. "That sort of man's always smitten with a girl if she doesn't fall down and worship him. I'd no patience with him when he was here. I never could get out of his way."

She moved as if she were thinking of going in.

"Oh, don't go," I said, flippantly, "just as we're getting on so beautifully. The night's still young."

She turned and looked at me curiously. "Do you know, you're not the least like what I thought you were," she said; "I thought you were so stern and cold. I was quite frightened of you."

"You're not frightened of me now? I'm perfectly harmless."

"Why, I feel as if I'd known you for years!" she laughed.

"That's right. Then there's no hope for Mr. John?"

"Why, I should knock his head against the wall before we'd been married a week, if only to wake him up."

"Perhaps he's only shy?"

"I hate shy men," she said.

"It's best to begin with a little aversion."

"Oh, don't tease me about him, please. I hope I shall never set eyes on him again, he's so stupid. Why, you might as well try and talk to a plaster-cast."

"A caster-plast, as my old guide used to call it in Rome."

Fanny laughed, and then I said, "Well, but what sort of men do you like?"

"I like clever men," she said, with conviction—"men who can talk and amuse me and tell me things." Then she added, turning to me suddenly, "Tell me, why have you come to Thorpe? We can't make you out!"

"Who's we?"

"Mr. Banquier and I," she said, boldly.

"Oh, you two have been discussing me, have you? And what have you decided about me, may I ask?"

"Shall I tell you? You won't be offended?"

"Not I!"

She paused a little, and then she said, rather nervously, "We both think you must have had an unhappy love affair."

"Oh! And what do you mean by an unhappy love affair?"

"I suppose — when the person you love doesn't love you in return."

"But what," I said, "if the lady you love's married?"

"If I were a man," said Fanny, with whispered energy, "and she loved me, I should run away with her."

"Oh, but that won't do!" I said, coldly. "Love isn't every excuse for conduct, is it?"

"Yes, every excuse! Love, like genius, makes its own laws."

"Miss Fanny Harewood," I said, laughing a little,

"clever men have indeed been telling you things. You're in a parlous way."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Take the converse case: Suppose a married man loved you; would you run away with him?"

"Yes, if I really loved him, and he didn't love his wife."

"You'd give up everything?"

"Everything!—in this world and the next!" she said, enthusiastically.

"Ah, you've been reading romances."

"What have romances to do with it? If I'd never read a book I should say the same thing. So would every woman worth the name."

"And duty?" I said. "What about duty?"

"A woman's duty," Fanny replied, hotly, "her first duty is towards the man she loves and who loves her. There is nothing else in the world worth considering!"

"And God and the Commandments?" She was silent. "Don't you believe in them?"

"Sometimes," she replied, slowly; "not always."

"Oh, Miss Fanny!" I said, tenderly, "you distress me."

"Why should I distress you?" she answered, touched; "what am I to you?"

I suppose it was the night and the hour that made us talk so freely and naturally. Once or twice such a thing has happened to me before; sitting out at dances in the country, I remember. Brooding, lonely girls who wanted a friend to lay bare their hearts to; whose troubled will needed strengthening, whose pure girlish resolves had been shaken by some Love-

lace. Unhealthy they were, I dare say — one can dismiss them with a mere phrase, if one likes—but which of us can hope always to be in the pink of condition, either physical or moral?

“Well,” said Fanny, “why don’t you answer me?”

“I was thinking,” I replied, “of the strange, useless baggage we all start on our life journey with; the amount of it we begin by carrying before we learn how to discard.”

“I don’t understand,” she said, quietly.

“Did you ever notice,” I asked her, “the amount of luggage people burden themselves with who know nothing about travelling? Compare the old traveller; he has one battered, plastered portmanteau!—and yet he has everything.”

“Well?”

“Perhaps the largest trunk of all, when we go out into the world for the first time, contains our illusions. For a generous girl, just beginning life, it is colossal. On her third voyage out, it has shrunk to the veriest hand-bag.”

“But what are illusions?”

“For a young girl, among many others, belief in men’s chivalry—in their constancy—outside of the law.”

She shivered and murmured, “Ah, don’t!”

Then she rose and said, resolutely, “I must go in.”

“Listen,” I said, and, reaching out my hand, took hers. She turned towards me with her head bent.

“You know I don’t want to make life seem sadder, harder to you than it is to all who try to do their duty; above all, that I don’t want to preach to you

like a prig. If you were my sister, I should not talk to you so at all, neither seriously nor flippantly. I should simply be with you and give you always a brother's companionship and care."

She pressed my hand slightly.

"Then treat me as a brother, will you?—as some one you can always make use of in any way."

She nodded her head.

"There is some one else here, too," I said, "who is interested in you. Can't you guess who it is?"

She looked up and shook her head. In the dark I could see her eyes were bright with tears.

"It's the cross old gentleman who lives at No. 1. He thinks of you constantly, and wants you to be well looked after."

"Can't I look after myself?" she asked, proudly, releasing her hand.

"I can't!" I replied, "not without some occasional friendly help. Good-night. We'll play tennis to-morrow, shall we?"

"If you like," she answered, and was gone.

The major's bedroom window was still lighted as, a little later, I went home to the farm. My lamp had burned itself out, and the room fumed with the odors of paraffine.

So Mr. Bundy resumes, equably, as though I'd never left him:

"It was at the end of '89, sir, that my peace and comfort came to an end. One evening, just as I got in from the office, my wife came to me and said she had good news; that her stories had been attracting attention in London, and that she'd just had a very

good offer from the editor of a London paper to write his leading articles for him at a salary of £500 a year.

"Oh yes, sir, I know!" says Mr. Bundy, fretfully. "Of course I oughtn't to have believed such a story, but at that time such an idea as doubting Flo never entered my head. I knew nothing about writing; I thought her one of the cleverest women in the world, and it seemed to me perfectly natural that a London editor should be glad to have her on his paper and pay her £500 a year. When I asked her the name, she said she would soon show me her first article, and, sure enough, next day she brought me the *Times*. The article was something about women and the County Council, and when Flo said she wrote it, and that the editor hadn't altered a word, it never occurred to me to doubt her."

Simple Mr. Bundy! what extraordinary simplicity there is still left in this worn, flat, old world of ours. Indeed, as the Frenchman said, it's a marvel there are not even more rogues, seeing the number of dupes about ready to hand.

"With £500 a year added to our income, Flo said it was impossible to remain in Pennington Street, and we were soon settled in a fine house at Hove. The principals at my office heard of it, of course, and had me in to question me. I suppose they thought I might have been tampering with the petty cash," he laughs sardonically.

"In our new house we soon began to find ourselves quite popular. Flo had always had the knack of making friends; even in Pennington Street we knew a good many people, but out at Hove we'd

half the best class of residents on our visiting-list. We gave dinner-parties and at-homes; and men whose wives could spend money fast enough, but couldn't make a sixpence—"

Unless by selling their old clothes, Mr. Bundy!

"—Were always envying me my clever wife, and congratulating me on my luck. When the crash came, of course, they said I'd always been in the secret, and was *particeps criminis*. Sir!" said Mr. Bundy, hoarsely, "it was a damned lie! After reading the first article I believed the story implicitly, and Flo used to complain I took so little interest in her work and never cared to read another. I did sometimes try, but you see, sir, the ones she showed me were always rather beyond my poor comprehension.

"At last, towards the end of '90, the bubble burst. How the woman had kept it dancing so long, Heaven alone knows. I can't understand it all, even now. Yes, sir, she'd been committing wholesale forgery. I believe she'd done it once before with her uncle, the clergyman, and been forgiven—at least, so I heard afterwards. He'd once sent her money, before the time when he never answered her letter, and she'd altered the amount on the check. When we went to Hove, she set to work right and left. She used to borrow money, give bills and forge the securities' names. When her uncle's bill was presented, of course payment was refused. He determined to put a stop to it, and got out a warrant. She heard of it somehow, and made up her mind to run away.

"She told some story of being sent by the paper abroad to do some work, but her manner and one or

two other little things made me suspect, and I forced the truth from her. I can't tell you, sir, what I suffered. I'm not a clever man, and can't describe. The only thing I felt was as if all my inside part had been taken out—my heart, my brain, everything!—and I was left as a sort of shell.

"There was no time for reproaches, for anything but running away. I took her to Southampton that night; every passenger, every porter, every soul I saw seemed a policeman. However, I got her safe on the boat, and saw her off to Hamburg. She insisted on my not coming, because of Dicky Thwaite; besides, if I ran away, too, people would think I knew all about it. She was to make her way from Hamburg to Sweden, if she could, and write me from there.

"From that day to this," cried Mr. Bundy, clinching his fist, knotting his forehead, "I have never had a single line! I suppose she's afraid I'm still watched, and that the letter might be opened. I've heard, however, from her mother that she's still in Sweden, and, what's more, happily married, if that's the right word, to a Swedish count or baron.

"She's a baroness! and for the last two years I've been a tramp, begging work and bread. It's a funny world; oh, it's a very funny world!" and Mr. Bundy gives a bitter laugh to prove how much the humor of their relative positions appeals to him.

"I was back in Brighton, sir, next morning," he goes on, slowly, "and faced the music alone. They arrested me, but they'd nothing to go on, and the magistrate wouldn't listen to the charge. I lost my berth, and in just one week, from the height of pros-

perity, as it seemed, found myself out on the pavement, everything sold up, an outcast, hand in hand with Dicky Thwaite.

"I went up to town with him, and found his mother in her Sloane Street house. I felt bound to tell her what had happened, and see if she still wanted me to keep the boy. I remember it struck even me as odd that, though it was the afternoon, she was wearing a diamond star in her hair. She said she still wanted me to keep him, and I suppose I should, only that her husband, Mr. Sneyd, happened to come in in the middle. We'd none of us heard him open the front door, and I thought his wife would have dropped when she saw him.

" 'It's only one of my charities, Robert,' she said, with a ghastly white smile. Yes, sir, she'd confessed to him about the girl in Brittany, but she'd never said a word about the boy.

"Her husband, however, wasn't quite such a fool as he looked, with his white waistcoat and long nose; he behaved like a man of spirit and a gentleman. He just looked at Dicky (there was no mistaking the likeness), and saying, 'You might have told me everything, Angela! the boy will stay here, of course,' walked straight out of the room, very haughty and determined. His wife's eyes were quite hard and black, and she stood looking out of the window, picking at her handkerchief.

"I said, 'I suppose I'd better leave him?' and she just said, savagely, 'Oh, go away!' So I kissed Dicky, and Dicky cried, and I couldn't help crying a little too; and so I found myself outside in Sloane Street, with nowhere to go, and three shillings in my pocket.

"But she's been punished," cries Mr. Bundy, with some natural vindictiveness, "for putting away her children like that. It's done her harm socially, as they say. People have said all sorts of scandalous things about her not being properly married before, and they tell me you don't see her name now at the fashionable parties not near so much. And the husband's been punished too; and quite right, for, of course, he only married her for her money. I've noticed, sir, that whatever wrong we do—even though it may seem right in the eyes of the world—we're always punished for it some time or other."

Yes, Mr. Bundy. The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind uncommon fine.

"And after all that, whither did your sad fortunes lead you?"

"I went to Stamford Hill, sir, and saw my father and sister. Ada had always hated my poor wife, and I believe she was glad at what had happened to her. She gave me a bed for a night or two, and then she turned me out to look for work. It was a long time before I found any, and nearly starved, but at last my acting brother managed to get me a place as baggageman in one of his companies, and I went round with them for a time and did a bit of acting when they were pressed. But it was a poor living, going round to those one and two night towns, and often having to return the money, and not being even able to pay for the hall. And my brother's wife didn't like me, and worked to get me out, because she said I was lazy and incompetent. I saw it, of course, and, being a bit proud, lost my temper with them and went away.

"I've never been a great favorite with the ladies, sir," observes Mr. Bundy, in one of his bursts of minor philosophy, "and if a man's not a favorite with the ladies it's very hard to get on in life, for he's got all the pushing to do himself, and that never was and never will be in my line.

"The only bright spot was that Dicky Thwaite wrote to me occasionally. They'd sent him to school at Marlborough, and he used often at first to write to me, and sometimes send a sovereign. But I was ashamed of taking the boy's money, much as I wanted it, and so I sent the last back, and told him I'd got a good place, and didn't want any more. I thought it better to lie, sir, than to go on sponging on a little chap like that."

I haven't the heart to question Mr. Bundy further. For a long time he sits there silent, at the little table covered with papers, running his thumb-nail along his upper lip, gazing out at the trees and the roof of the cottage opposite, with that tired, sunken eye of his.

Then he rouses himself, as though he were bound in honor to tell me the rest.

"How I've lived since then, sir, if you can call it life, I really don't know. For two years and more it has been a martyrdom," he says, with trembling voice. "Each day, sir, has been a companion shadow to the other."

Sad phrase! but how faithfully it paints the pallid daylight of want.

"I've got a little work haymaking in the summer, and in August and September I've gone hopping, down at Orpington and Tunbridge way. I've picked

fruit, too, out at Bexley. Last winter and the winter before I went to sea, coasting between the Thames and the Tyne. Since April, sir, I've done nothing; nothing, that is, but tramp and starve," he adds with a savage laugh, "and no one knows till they've tried it how easy it is to starve in this country. I've kept out of prison, somehow, but I ought by rights to be there. I once committed a burglary—at least, I suppose it's burglary if you break into a house to get food, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes, that's burglary, Mr. Bundy, if you do it at night."

How often I have seen such cases in country as-size towns on circuit!—silent, rough, famished men in the dock, and the dull rustic policeman giving evidence. How he 'rested the prisoner in the kitchen of a common lodging-house, and how the nails in his boots exactly fitted the nail-marks outside the window of the entered house, and how the prisoner had finished a rabbit-pie and half a cheese, and drunk two bottles of beer, and how there were cigars found in the prisoner's pockets, taken from the glass on the public-house counter and identified by the land-lady.

"I prodooce the cigaws," says the policeman, pompously, and lays the dank British products on the ledge of the witness-box. Whereat there's a titter in court, and the javelin men cry, "*Soilence ! soilence !*" angrily.

And in each such man in the dock I shall henceforth see another Robert Bundy, and, so far as I can give it (though, to be sure, it is not I who have been robbed), my heart will go out to him in pardon.

"Yes, sir," resumes Mr. Bundy, his lip trembling, "I'm a burglar. I was mad for food. I'd had none for thirty hours. It was a farm-house near Northampton I robbed. I got in at the window out of the yard about one in the morning. I found some beef and ham and bread and whiskey in a cupboard, and I made the best meal off it I'd had for two years. And then I felt I was going to sleep, and should be caught if I didn't get away; but before I went I managed to scrawl a few lines on the leaf of a book, just to say I wouldn't have touched their food if I hadn't been starving, and that the first money I made I'd send it in payment. And then I propped the book against the whiskey-bottle, and tumbled out of the window and walked a bit, and I got into a coppice and fell down like a stone and slept till morning.

"Lord!" says Mr. Bundy, "what a lovely summer's morning it was, and how the birds were singing! Ah, and I was nearly caught, too! for I heard a policeman talking to the farmer on the road about it, saying it was one of Jem Wright's tricks, and that he'd go and give him a look-up."

Mr. Bundy laughs, and then he adds, "So when they'd gone, I got out of the coppice and scuttled over the fields and got clear away. Ah, and I've kept my word, sir," he says, emphatically, "about paying them back, for on Monday, after you so kindly paid me, I sent the farmer the three shillings for his food. I found his name was Jackson in the book I wrote in, and his address was the Lane End Farm, near Northampton. So I think we're quits there."

Nothing more for Mr. Bundy to tell, for I know the rest of his story. How the good major met him outside the village, foot-sore, vacant, starving; how he questioned and took—nay, almost carried—him, limping, home to his shelter in the Redan; how tenderly he waited on, fed, and clothed him. In a word, what a pure and simple Christian he has been to him.

Oh, the world, the world, what a different place it might be if only we would more rigorously observe those divine precepts! if only, for example, we would never grow weary in well-doing.

Faintly, in the silence that has come between us, steals into the room the piano organ in the village.

There is one question, however, I desire to ask Mr. Bundy before he goes: What has become of his wife's father? the man who forged the widow's name and went to penal servitude.

"Mr. Harper, sir?" said Mr. Bundy, starting from his reverie. "Oh, he was let out on a ticket-of-leave, and came down to us at Brighton, when we were in Pennington Street. He kept quiet with us for a few months; one of the most amusing, sociable, pleasant men, sir, I ever met. I remember once we'd one of the chaps from the office to dinner one Sunday. We'd a leg of mutton, and Mr. Harper let out he hadn't tasted mutton for over three years. I understand they don't give mutton in prison, sir.

"And yet," Mr. Harper says, quite natural and unconcerned, "there was lots of black sheep at the place I was staying at in Dorsetshire."

"The chap from the office told me he thought him one of the nicest gentlemen he ever met.

"But it didn't last long, his keeping quiet; he got tired of Brighton and went up to London, where he fell among a bad gang, men he'd known at Portland, and such like. Men get to know each other in prison. They can talk to each other from cell to cell quite easily, by slanting the table up against the wall and whispering down the legs. Mr. Harper said it makes a sort of telephone.

"He and half a dozen of his friends got caught over what they call the long firm frauds, and he went back for his unexpired time and another five years. He died in prison at Wormwood Scrubs. We brought him down to Brighton, and buried him at Preston. Almost the last words my wife said to me on board the Southampton boat, the night she had to run away, were to make me promise to look after her father's grave. I'm afraid the flowers have been rather neglected, sir, these last two or three years. Perhaps I'll go there again some day."

Two o'clock? Impossible! Yet here's Mrs. Chick come to lay the lunch.

"Sir," says Mr. Bundy, rising, "I'm afraid I've wasted your morning. Another day, sir, you must kindly not let me talk so much."

Mrs. Chick looks at me with staid reproof, "You've not had your usual morning walk, sir."

No, Mrs. Chick; with the result that I've no *Daily Telegraph* from the post-office to prop up against the water-bottle.

But I have something even more improving to think over in *les causeries de Bundi*.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAJOR'S CONFIDENCES—I OVERHEAR SOMETHING
STRANGE—SOMETHING STRANGER THAT MR. CARL-
TON SAW

THE major came round soon after lunch; rather a bore, as I was just composing myself for a few moments' slumber.

Mr. Chick tells me he has the same genial habit. He goes off for ten minutes after his twelve-o'clock dinner, and wakes up "fresh as a daisy" for a long afternoon's work. So do I, to a long afternoon's idleness, by which we both of us secure another morning as it were.

The major was dressed in a washed-out gray suit, much creased and folded, and carried a soft hat, suggesting the Tyrolean. He had come round to ask how Bundy was doing, and to thank me on his behalf.

I told him Bundy was invaluable, and that I was grateful for his recommending him to me.

"You'll want him some little time yet, eh?" the major ventured, eying me apprehensively.

"So long as I'm here, at any rate, if you can spare him."

"Oh, I can spare him, poor devil! I suppose you don't know any one who'd give him a berth in

town? However," he said, hastily, as though he felt he were asking too much, "you can turn that over in your mind and let me know later. I've a brother in business in Manchester, and I've written to him. He might give him an odd job in the counting-house. All I want is to prevent the man going downhill again."

"It's odd, surely," I replied, "his going downhill as he has. He doesn't seem to have any vices."

"Oh, vices very often keep a man active," said the major, acutely, "because he has to satisfy them. Bundy's fault is that he's lethargic. He wants energy, sir, and push. I don't grudge the man shelter and food, God knows! but he'd have sat there all his life if I'd let him, and never made an effort to get anything to do. Why, even now, if the morning's uncommonly fine, I have to remind him what o'clock it is, and hurry him off to his work here."

"I suppose that story of his is all true?"

"I suppose so; it's strange enough."

"The difficulty is," I said, "that when a man tells his own story you can't very well distinguish between the child of misfortune, a character jealously cast for tragedy, and the gentleman who has to wallow in distress of his own pure manufacture."

"Aye!" said the major, "that's true enough."

While we were talking there came a tap at my sliding window, and going to it I found there, below me, the radiant face of Miss Harewood.

She often passes the farm on her way to a couple of shy cottages almost opposite, where she has pensioners; particularly a slatternly, good-looking slip

of a girl of sixteen she's kind to, who draggles about in somebody else's left-off skirts.

"Oh, you are in!" she laughed, as I slid the window open.

The major kept quite still.

"I only wanted to know if you'd play tennis with us at four."

"Delighted; just what I should like."

"Miss Ryle's coming, and the doctor later. Mind you come punctually, or you'll spoil the set. That's all. Good-bye." And she was gone without a reference to our meeting of last night. I think she must have caught sight of the major within.

As I closed the window the major went to the other, and watched her disappear through the gate and down between the narrow hedges that led to the cottage.

I looked at him, standing there for some few minutes saying nothing, and confess I wished he'd go. Nature was calling for her ten minutes. *A little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep*, in the words of the "Song of Songs."

He kept looking out across the road, and at last he said, half to himself, "Very strange how life repeats itself!"

Then he turned to me, and, with a sort of deliberate eloquence, "I knew that girl's mother, sir, years ago," he said. "I remember, much more clearly than if it were yesterday, her mother coming to a window, tapping on it, and asking me to come and play croquet at four, with almost precisely the same look and voice as Miss Fanny's."

"Where was that, Major Ross?"

"At Scarborough, sir, in the year '66. I was there for a few weeks in the summer, and Miss Fanny's mother's people were staying there, too, in the same terrace. Croquet was all the rage then in the squares, just like tennis and golf are now."

"But I don't understand, Major Ross, why you don't make friends with Miss Harewood, and tell her all this. The more friends she has in the place the better, it seems to me."

"Oh, as I've said to you before, sir," he replied, pathetically, looking inside his hat with a worn, tender smile, "we old fellows are a nuisance to charming young ladies. Besides, she's well looked after now; she don't want me. She wouldn't thank me for taking her away from that young gentleman at No. 13 who's paying her so much attention. I'm told he's very clever and promising, and fairly well off. So I just stand aside, sir! I just stand aside."

"But, anyhow, wouldn't you like her to know—"

"Not for worlds!" His sharp voice grew deep and trembled, and he put his hand out on my arm. "Her poor mother hadn't a very happy life, I'm afraid, and Miss Fanny might question me about her. What could I say, then? what is the use of raking up these old unhappy stories? No, no, not a word to her, please."

He saw, I suppose, I was going to say something—perhaps, as he thought, to ask something—for he went on eagerly, "Some day, perhaps, when she's happily married, I may tell her something. But not now. Ah, it's strange," he added, looking out of the window again, as though he expected her to return, "that, in a village like this, of all places in the world,

her mother should come back to me so clearly after nearly thirty years."

He had loved her, said I to myself, and Harewood had carried her off from him, and then made her life a misery. I could understand, too, that he didn't care to meet his old sweetheart's child. Protect her, no doubt, from a distance, from a conning-tower, as it were; but not renew the old bitterness by anything approaching personal contact.

"Well, good-bye," he said, straightening himself and looking like the rigid major I was accustomed to, "I mustn't detain you; you've work to do, no doubt. I'm going up to see my boy at Ferrier's."

"Give him my love, and tell him to stick to the *cæsura*."

"I will, I will. God bless you! You've been very kind to him and Bundy; you're a good fellow," he was kind enough to add, and left me with a curious, old-fashioned bow.

And, after a page or two of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, I was very soon in the desired confused condition, on the harsh sofa that is propped up against the wall with a couple of large bricks. Then I went off to tennis, feeling as fresh as that primitive daisy, Mr. Chick.

Nine o'clock.

A very strange thing has just happened—at least, it seems strange to me, though it may not to another at a distance, who, perhaps, can see the pattern of this place more clearly than I.

I came back after tennis to dress for dinner—rather, I didn't come back straight, but after leaving the Hall went across to the Carltons'.

The little house already shows signs of their approaching departure; books are put away, ornaments removed (they are leaving on Friday), and Mrs. Carlton came down to me with that fatigued, flurried look which always portends packing.

I inquired after the baby, who has not been very well lately, and of the details of their visit to town and so on, and then Mrs. Carlton asked me if I had seen her husband, who had been to look for me.

I said no, I had been all the afternoon at the Hall.

"Was Mr. Banquier there?" she asked.

"He came in about six and played a set or two."

"And Miss Harewood, was she there the whole time?"

"She was, and played a good deal better than usual. Have you seen anything of her lately, Mrs. Carlton?"

"Scarcely anything. I can't get her to come here, and she's never in if I go there."

"But you saw a good deal of her in the spring."

"She was always with us. I thought we might have offended her in some way, and spoke to her about it, but she only laughed, and said: 'What nonsense!'—that she hadn't wanted to bore us by always being in and out of the house."

The gentle woman's face was troubled and clouded as she added: "Of course there wasn't the attraction then there is now to keep her away from us."

I kept silent and rose to go, saying I had only just looked in to ask after the baby.

She said, "I know Tom wants to see you. You won't care to come out again in the evening, I dare

say, after so much tennis, and, besides, we are all in such a muddle here; but perhaps you won't mind if Tom comes round later and smokes a pipe with you."

"Please tell him I shall be delighted. We shall meet to-morrow night at the party at the rectory?"

"Oh yes; we've put off our going till Friday on purpose."

I came back to the farm, and went up-stairs to dress for dinner, thinking what Tom Carlton could want to see me about. Perhaps some ticklish passage in the "Georgics" he desires to consult over, not being himself a great Latinist.

My bedroom is immediately over the sitting-room; two of the windows look into the farm-yard, and one on to the road.

The window that faces the road was open; it was a dark, close evening, inclining to rain.

I was standing close by it, putting the studs in my shirt, when I heard steps outside and voices. I was singing "Bendemeer's Stream" raucously to myself, and directly I heard the voices I stopped.

It is one of my many deplorably bad habits that if I hear people talking I must listen. The most indefensible curiosity; no one knows that better than I. Invariably, for instance, I select by preference a railway carriage as full as possible, that I may have the satisfaction of hearing what they all have to say: how foolishly Emma is behaving about the children, and how very wrong of Mary and George to take so large a house when they must know they can't afford to live in it.

Stopping my song, then, listening (I'm ashamed

to say) at the window, I heard a lady's voice say, sharply and crossly, in tones of vexed remonstrance:

"But really!—since you're her father!"

I paused, rigid, to hear the answer, but there was none I could catch, only the deprecatory murmur of a lower voice.

As the steps died away down the road I looked out after them.

It was the major and Miss Kearsley.

Half-past eleven.

So far I had written, when Mr. Carlton was ushered in to me.

"Busy?" he asked, regarding me and my journal like an intelligent marmoset.

"Not the least; delighted to see you. How have you been getting on with the 'Georgics?'"

"Haven't done a stroke of work for a week."

"Are you going to work in town?"

"Not except in the picture-galleries and theatres," he said, sitting by the fireplace. "Mustn't burn the candle at both ends."

"And how long do you expect to be away?" I asked, handing him the whiskey.

"Oh, about a month."

"Then you come back here?"

"Yes, for the next three or four years, I suppose," he grumbled.

"*O nimium fortunate!*" I chanted.

"Ah, I dare say!" he grunted, blowing down his pipe, "that's what everybody says who doesn't know this place quite so well as I."

Then he turned to me, sitting on the other side of the fireplace; for, somehow, even if you've no fire,

there is the only natural place to sit. "When do you go?"

"I haven't an idea. But I think I shall just run up for one or two of the big matches at Lord's."

"Shall you be here in August?"

"Very likely, or I may go to Scotland, or abroad."

"Happy man!" said he, "to be able to pack up a bag and be off just where you like."

"Happy man!" said I, "to have a home, a charming wife, a child."

He grunted again, discontentedly, and I added,

"Qui fit, Mæcenas, ut nemo, quam sibi sortem—"

"You're very full of Latin this evening," he said; "good job they're all familiar quotations."

We settled ourselves luxuriously with our tobacco and the whiskey, and then, "By-the-way, have you seen anything of Banquier lately?" he asked.

"Nothing for the last ten days, except just playing at the Hall this evening. You know I've been seedy and rather shut up."

"He hasn't been round here to complain of me?"

"No; why should he?"

"We've had a row—a devil of a row!"

Foreseeing some literary squabble, I kept quiet while Mr. Carlton filled his pipe. I expected a catalogue of griefs—miscomprehension, arrogance of judgment, pretensions to infallibility, all the sum of the disputes that sooner or later invariably part devoted literary friends.

After a pause he said, "I'm going to tell you ex-

actly what happened, and then you can judge for yourself. What's to-day?"

"Wednesday."

"Very well, then; it was to-day week, or, rather, early Thursday morning. You know the baby's not been very well, and, in consequence, our nights have been a bit broken. I was asleep, and thought I heard him cry. I got up to have a look, and found he was off as fast as a cherub. It was quite light, about half-past three. As I was up, I thought I'd just look what sort of morning it was. Our room's at the back, you know, and at the side, on the right, we can see the backs of some of the houses in the Redan. It was the most delightful summer's morning, the sun just up; everything looked as if it had been washed, it was all so clean and bright."

He paused.

"Well?"

"I don't know," he went on, irritably, "why a man should suppose it was my imagination, or say I was dreaming. It's absurd!—for coming out of the back of one of the Redan houses—"

"Which?"

"No. 5—Mrs. Pearce's; coming out of that house I saw Banquier as plainly as I see you now."

"You saw Banquier!"

"Of course I did. He was just closing the door behind him as I looked out through the blind."

"Well?"

"He went down the few iron steps there are there, in that curious sidelong way of his, and through the back yard with his head down. Then he shut the door into the lane—what they call Angel Lane—very

cautiously, and went off towards the front of the Redan."

"That was last Thursday morning. Have you said anything about it?"

"I said nothing at first. I thought it very odd, but I didn't imagine there was anything wrong. I thought perhaps he couldn't sleep, and wanted to take a walk; I thought he might have left his stick at Mrs. Pearce's—"

"A man doesn't go into a house to fetch a stick at half-past three in the morning. Good gracious!"

"Well, I don't quite know what I thought. Banquier's a queer creature, and at any rate I felt sure there was some perfectly simple explanation of what there could be no sort of doubt I saw."

"You didn't even mention it to your wife?"

"Just listen. On Friday I met him out on the Green, and I asked him casually what he was doing committing burglary at Mrs. Pearce's at half-past three on Thursday morning."

"What did he say?"

"He must be a deuced fine actor, for he just stopped and stared at me as if he didn't in the least understand what I was talking about. 'Oh, come, Banquier!' I said, 'don't look so innocent, for I happened to be up and saw you come out of the house perfectly plainly. Were you after the spoons?'"

"What did he say to that?"

"He said, perfectly coolly, 'What on earth are you talking about? Have you gone suddenly cracked?'"

"Well?"

"I said, 'But you don't mean to tell me I didn't see you?' and he just answered, quite naturally, 'What in the name of goodness should I be doing coming out of the house at that hour?'"

"Ingenious ruffian!" I cried. "How did you meet that?"

"It was my turn to stare," Carlton replied; "I was dumfounded. 'You'll make me think something really is wrong,' I said, 'if you deny it. You don't suppose I should say I saw you if I didn't?' 'On the other hand,' said he, sharply, 'it's scarcely fair to make me responsible for your hallucinations, is it?' So I just answered, 'Then I've been dreaming?'"

"To which Banquier, I suppose, replied, 'Of course you have!'"

"And he'd the impudence," said Carlton, angrily, "to add, 'And I advise you, my good friend, to guard yourself against the common failing of telling your dreams, or you'll get yourself into trouble, and what, perhaps, is more important, others who are quite innocent.'"

"I was so furious at his hard, insolent manner," Carlton went on, "that I just turned on my heel and left him. However, to make sure I hadn't mistaken the number, I went down Angel Lane and tried the back door I'd seen him come out of. It was No. 5, of course. The door was stiff, but it was unlocked. I believe it's scarcely ever used, because the tradesmen go round to the front, but it opens and shuts easily enough."

"Tell me," I asked, "how was Banquier dressed when you saw him?"

"That's another thing. You can't mistake that smoking-suit of his, can you?"

"Well, have you seen him since?"

"Yes. I was so hurt and angry, that on Saturday morning I went round to the Redan. He was writing, and just looked up, sneering, to say, 'Well, any more dreams? Come for an interpretation?'"

"He's got his back to the wall."

"'Look here, Banquier,' I said," Carlton went on, bending forward and pointing his observations with his pipe-stem, "'I've just come to say this: Unless you can give me some honest, rational explanation of what I saw with my own eyes, I must ask you to cease coming to my house, and I decline henceforth all acquaintance with you.'

"'You've forestalled me,' said Banquier; 'I was just coming round to make a somewhat similar demand on you. An apology and retractation, or the immediate close of a very pleasant and promising friendship.'

"'Then you refuse?' I asked. 'Don't be absurd,' said he, and went on writing. 'Good-morning.'

"Since then," said Carlton, "I've only seen him to cut him. But what a short-sighted fool he is! If he'd only given an explanation, even the most unlikely, I should have accepted it, whereas now one necessarily imagines all sorts of horrible things."

"Does your wife know about it now?"

"Yes, I told her yesterday, and she suggested my coming round and consulting with you."

"I suppose nothing has been said to Mrs. Pearce or Miss Harewood?"

"Oh, not a word! Why, what could one say?"

"Well, to begin with," I said, "one could tell them in future to keep their back and front doors locked."

"Oh, don't treat it lightly, for Heaven's sake!" cried Carlton, frowning, "it's been a great shock to me, the more I've thought of it. I'm glad we're going away, I really am."

He paused and smoked and sipped his whiskey-and-water, and then he said, "What I've really come about now is this: Don't you think you might do something?"

"With Banquier? What more attention will he pay me than you?"

"Well, but you might find out what sort of man he really is; for, after this, I'm sure *I* don't know! You might, for instance, put Mrs. Pearce on her guard against him, in a cautious way, mightn't you? It's no use speaking to him about what I saw, no doubt, but you might at least give him to understand how fearfully he's compromising Miss Harewood, and how clearly we all think that unless his engagement is definitely announced very soon, he'll be behaving like a blackguard—the blackguard, by-the-way, I begin to fear he really is. Don't you think you might do something of that sort gradually?"

So much for Banquier; but was there no one to speak to Miss Harewood?—no one, definitely, to champion her interests?

Instantly, I thought again of what I had been thinking at dinner, of what I had heard Miss Kearsley say outside on the road.

"*Her father!*" I had had no doubt she meant the

major and poor Fanny. And if that were so—oh, the tangle of it!—could there be any doubt whose duty it was to come forward, whose plain duty it was to champion the unhappy girl's interests?

I had seemed to see it all at once. The major was Major Harewood, Fanny's father, after all; the man Sir Arthur told me of, who had levanted from Exeter with the tradesman's daughter. Fanny had been brought up in the belief he was dead all the years he had been living at Redcar.

Accident, or perhaps the major's express design, had brought father and daughter together again, and part of his punishment for the old offence had been to see how little his child was protected, how much she needed a father's care and love; how powerless he was unless he declared himself.

And now! Had he saved himself, kept himself apart, waited only for this, to be too late? Oh, the dire, dire tangle of it all!

CHAPTER XVI

AN EXCURSION—FRIENDLY PEOPLE

THE morning wears away, calm and sunny, as though there were no trouble impending in Thorpe.

Bundy comes and does his work, and, when I inquire after the major, tells me he doesn't seem at all well. He says he walks about half the night, and he won't or can't eat.

"He seems very miserable, sir," says Bundy, sadly.

To-night there's a party at the rectory to which we are all going, even the major, I hear. Once a year, during Miss Sophia's visit, she insists on upsetting her brother's house by giving an at-home; cards and music at nine, and sandwiches and claret and soup before we go.

As for me, soon after lunch I drove over in a pony trap, hired from Marling, five miles away, to tennis. The people were strangers to me, but some of my Oxford friends had told them of my being in the neighborhood, and asked them to invite me.

So I went. Anything was better, I felt, than hanging about the village doing nothing; so I went, trying to make believe as I drove that the whole world was bright and pure, that the devil wasn't lurking even behind country hedges, even up in the great elm in my quiet, slumbrous Redan.

Friendly people! I must say I like friendly people. To drive in among them at a tennis-party, a complete stranger, and yet be warmly welcomed; the mamma to ask your opinion at once as to whether she can take her daughters on the barges at Oxford for the college races; the father to conduct you over the church and tell you all about it, confident your interest is not all pretence; the pretty daughters to smile frankly, and when it rains a little to sing you the society ballads of five years ago. I half expected Miss Maudie to break out into "Twickenham Ferry."

The tennis-court is uneven, the play weak, but what does that matter when the people are so kind and friendly? Doves and pigeons flutter and swoop, terrified with the balls.

Among us all only one unpleasant, superior female, in a tight black silk, quite a private-view costume. She sits all her affected length, talking stale ship-slop out of the society papers, when a tennis-ball dumps her on her long nose. Fashionable consternation and abject apologies; but I cannot help being glad, and I laugh behind my racquet.

I know her kind so well. She presses one of the pretty daughters to sing, and talks all through it; pecks at her through her veil when she is going, and tells her she must come and spend the day and sing to her again. She disappears—hang her!—with a smile like a bad photograph, convinced we are all delighted with her affability and condescension, and envy her her charming, high-bred manner.

Present also an engaging youth with the most enormous Sandhurst side on; happily, six months with his regiment will knock all that out of him.

Also present two dim young ladies of the ineffective description I cannot conceive as being any good or satisfaction to any one. No doubt they are; no doubt they have their place in the cosmic system, but you don't see it very readily at a tennis-party—at least, I don't.

The youngest daughter, Maudie, gives me syringa when we part; she is one large, healthy, cool blush. She says, "It's such rot, me singing!" but she sings away quite unaffectedly—bless her! trills and plays her own accompaniments while I sit, quite tender-hearted, and watch her bright, fresh profile.

Good-bye, dear, friendly people! May I land again some other day in your green and checkered island; may your welcome be as sincere, and I only worthy of it.

They wave to me from the porch as I urge down the drive my depressed little rat-tailed pony.

—Wae's me! I fear I must be growing tainted; I, who only came to Thorpe for rest and quiet. For I find myself thinking as I drive home along—

"Yes; no doubt these people seem friendly and sincere enough if one drives in among them just for an afternoon, with all the halo of interest every stranger wears in the country. But if one got to know them as I have grown to know Thorpe, one would find just the same passions at work, distorting them, bringing them all down to the common mud-level. The devil is surely there, lurking among those neat laurel-bushes; his horns are in that simple drawing-room, just as surely as the horns that hang there in the hall, sent by the soldier-brother from Cashmere.

"Ask the parishioners about the rector, see what poor report they give of him; question the neighbors

about the mother, how she schemes to get invitations to the country-houses, how she's dying to marry her daughters to any young man who can support them a little better than they've been accustomed to. And the daughters—ah, the daughters!—Phyllis and Chloris, who seemed so artless and innocent—”

Faugh! pray let me make haste to send for an ounce of civet to the stores. I think I must be going mad to have these doubts of the honesty and purity of all the world. Wasn't it one of the sure signs of poor Hamlet's creeping craziness, when he began to see in Ophelia—*O rose of May! dear maid, kind sister*—a mere breeder of sinners? worse, an inevitable inmate of a nunnery, that melancholy Danish equivalent home for the lost and fallen.

It is the price one pays, I fear, for being brought in contact with some sorry story in life, to see shame everywhere—at least, till the mind recovers its balance. I remember, after my visit to Bedlam, I couldn't believe but that all I met in the streets as I went back over Westminster Bridge, down the Embankment to the Temple, were mad.

Oh, Thorpe, sunny Thorpe! give me back my belief in your innocence, the confidence in your calm that first was mine as I drove up to the farm in the milk-cart with Mr. Chick.

Ineluctabile fatum! I must dine and dress and go to the rectory, must take the major aside, entreat his interference.

And I thought to be so happy here, so far from anything approaching pain or trouble.

Blue—blue are the hills that are far from us! as the Gaelic proverb sings.

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE RECTORY — HOME WITH THE MAJOR — THE CATASTROPHE

ALL our small society were assembled at the rectory for the party when I arrived there rather late.

Miss Sophia, in a wonderful large-patterned gown, and a bouquet from the greenhouse, greeted me fashionably at the door with "*So good of you to come! You'll find all your friends here.*"

The Rev. Nathaniel, in an ill-fitting dress-suit (does one ever see a clergyman whose dress-clothes look as if they had been made for him?), gave me a soft, moist hand and a sad shake of the head, as much as to say, "This is the last merry gathering of you all I shall ever be present at. Nay, do not pity me; it is better so."

All the evening he funereally conducted detachments to the refreshments in the dining-room. If his guests doubted between tongue sandwiches or cucumber, he said he never touched either, anything eaten at night was death to him. All he meant was, he'd had a remarkably good dinner, and wasn't hungry. For the rest, he mostly watched the whist with his hands folded in front of him, as though he were immediately about to strike up the first lesson.

Quietly, just as I came in, the piano begins, before

I've had time to make out the whereabouts of the major.

It's Miss Fanny, playing one of Heller's "Sleepless Nights," No. 3.

She looks perfectly charming on the low music-stool, wax-candle-lit, in some sort of yellow tussore-silk frock, her pretty arms and smooth shoulders bare. She wears a curious smile as she plays, the corners of the mouth drawn slightly upward, the sly smile of Da Vinci's "Joconde." There seems something about her to-night (it may be from the way her hair is dressed) of a French Venus of the Pompadour period; something, too, of the vivacious repose of a head by Watteau. She seems calm, yet victorious; smiling, yet not altogether mirthful.

I have scarcely spoken to her since our talk at midnight in the Redan. When we were playing tennis at the Hall she seemed to avoid me, as though she feared if we were left alone together I should begin preaching at her again. And now, bending forward, her head slightly on one side, she plays the delicate and penetrating melody—smiling—smiling—though somehow her eyes seem graver than her mouth.

They say that Heller wrote his "Sleepless Nights" after the death of a daughter whom he dearly loved. He couldn't sleep, and (like Caligula, wandering about the vast palace of the Cæsars, trying the different couches he had ordered to be placed there, ready for him in the drowsiest porticos), like him, I fancy Heller wandering through the dull, empty German house, from piano to writing-table, pacing the dead girl's room, the shadowed passages; till his grief

found voice and relief in his art, and, his emotion exhausted, at last he found repose.

It seemed to me as though the same emotions that had moved Heller were moving in the major as he leaned on the end of the piano with folded hands, his haggard profile towards me, watching Fanny play. His face was contracted grievously, his hands clasped tight as though in the effort to keep a hold on himself; he looked thinner, more worn, more melancholy even, than before.

Poor old man! What grief, regret, remorse must have been tearing at his vitals with their horrid, crooked talons. Father and daughter standing within six feet of each other, and yet between them so great a gulf fixed!

Ah, what fools we are, what bitter, thoughtless fools! the light gay fashion we so often turn the first sod of that great gulf, one day to part us from our better selves, our better loves; a gulf that begins by being a mere Strid for a resolute man to cross, that ends in a chasm to be bridged by neither time nor eternity.

Sitting on a round ottoman at Fanny's side, rising dully to turn over when she gave a smiling little bow that she was ready, was Banquier. His dress-clothes improved him; he didn't seem so clumsy in them as in flannels or tweed. He was leaning forward as he sat, his elbows on his knees, the points of his fingers against his teeth. For the first time I noticed that his eyes don't seem to be set quite straight.

And to complete the quartette, leaning against the wall on Fanny's other side, was Captain Poynder. No

one had told me of his arrival (tragic enough, surely, at such a time as this?), but I recognized him at once.

I fear Miss Harewood had summed him up correctly when she called him an unattractive Greek god. He was quite as handsome as his photograph, but there was something tight, what the French call *fermée*, in his physiognomy that made one seem to read him at a glance.

Impassive, beautiful, stupid, ancient, gem-like young man, one felt inclined to warn him back to Olympus; to call to him that now the empire of mere form and outline was ended, there was no place for him here, among folk who are ready to worship Wilkes for all his squint.

That's more than a century back, it's true, but what is a century in the eye of calm Olympus?

So good of him to come, in Miss Sophia's formula; but I think it's very hard for Hermes condescendingly to move among us once more in blameless dress-clothes, and find himself scarcely tolerated; probably sniggered over, even in a girls' school.

Why, you can almost read the captain's character in his collar and white tie, for they were both of them the choosing and the effort of a school-boy.

"Better have stayed in Sheffield, captain," I said to myself. "Better make up to the boileress there, who'll keep you all your days in pink cotton-wool. Anything's better, surely, than wasting your time here chasing a girl who's so little touched by your impeccable profile that she finds it even laughable in its pure regularity. And what a time to choose for the pursuit! What an unfortunate moment to select

for the soft-breathing, melodious, god-like *halila* ! of a love-chase !”

As Miss Fanny plays, I feel the life of the party stirring behind and round me. The dry, bored coughs of the Vegetarian ladies, utterly neglected, by the window, in flowing, shapeless gowns that give me the impression of having once been morning-room curtains somewhere ; the fall of the cards at the whist-table, the click of the markers, the deep, dissatisfied “My word !” of Mrs. Martin, who finds herself again with only one trump.

Sir Arthur is her partner, while the doctor faces her ladyship. The doctor and her ladyship throw out their cards with an airy grace which knows no rule, but appears eminently successful ; Sir Arthur and Mrs. Martin play a fine, artful game, ending in constant disaster and loss. Her ladyship delights to irritate him by covering her last card with her fat hands, and refusing to expose it till the others are on the table. The last trick is invariably hers, and Sir Arthur looks as if he could kill her where she sits, sly and triumphant. The Rev. Nathaniel watches the game and sighs heavily at the way the winners play, as though their successful vagaries cut his righteous heart.

Mrs. Pearce, between Miss Ryle and Mrs. Carlton, surveys us despitefully through her long glasses. I feel she is staring at me ; I feel she is saying to herself, “When is that gentleman coming to pay his respects to me ? when is he going to ask me, awe-struck, how I do ?”

I catch Miss Ryle’s eye ; she nods and smiles. She looks very happy and good-humored in white. Mrs.

Carlton is tired and worried and grave; she doesn't look so well at night as she does on the Green with the perambulator. She doesn't seem very becomingly dressed, or perhaps it's only because she's tired from her packing.

Force of London habit keeps Miss Sophia by the open door ready to greet more guests who may be dropping in later, coming on from somewhere else. Mr. Carlton stands by her talking in whispers.

Our only comparative stranger is Mr. Williams, one of the masters from Heath Hill. I tumbled over his boots in the hall; he has walked over smoking, and he'll walk the three miles back, ditto. He's a bright little man of six-and-twenty, and one of the best half-backs they ever had at Cambridge. He comes and chuckles to me over Tommy, and begs me to come up and play in a pick-up game on Saturday. He smells like the inside of a warm old brier-wood pipe.

When Miss Fanny stops, and we all murmur "Thank you," and "What is that?" she rises and the major comes to her. She smiles and gives him her music to look at; Captain Poynder joins them, and the three talk together. Banquier remains on his ottoman looking up at them, as much as to say, "Ah, you may talk to her, but she's mine. She's mine! I've only to beckon or whistle, and she'd come to me at once."

And then, here and there, rustles and plunges Miss Sophia, trying to get more music out of us. Miss Ryle laughs, and says she's afraid she has no parlor tricks. Notwithstanding I have such a musical face—so Miss Sophia declares!—I cannot be tempted

from the Vegetarian ladies, who are telling me of the great congress they're going to attend at Farringdon Hall next month on the important question whether vegetarians are henceforth to eat starch or not. It will scarcely be settled, for everybody reads a paper contradicting everybody else.

So Mrs. Carlton plays the melody in F, perhaps a little heavily, and our hostess herself obliges us with the "Musical Box." Estimable woman, she took off her gloves—but really! the "Musical Box" and the self-satisfied way she tittle-tattled through it are quite indescribable. It made me feel fifty years younger, in the prime days of *La Grace*.

What "amazing devil"—as Dickens says—it was then that prompted Miss Sophia suddenly to clap her fan in her hand and announce we were all going to play games, I know not. It was met by Mrs. Martin saying, loudly, "Cut again quickly," and for fear of being dragged into unseemly romps the four whist-players were immediately absorbed in watching the deal.

"Silence, please, and attention!"

Mrs. Martin grunted, and hurled the cards out as though her life depended on it. Miss Sophia whispered to Mr. Williams, who left the room and came back with a poker.

"Now we are going," said Miss Sophia, standing in the middle of the room, as though she were directing a school-feast—poor Williams looking uncommonly foolish beside her with the poker—"we are going to try turning round on the poker three times and walking out of the door.

"Dr. Martin!"

The doctor hastily gathered up his hand and turned an affrighted visage towards her.

"Will you begin?"

The doctor spluttered he was afraid he couldn't spoil the rubber.

"Too bad of you!" said Miss Sophia, mechanically. "Well, then, Mr. Carlton?"

The bold Carlton asked in agitated tones what was expected of him. We were all in a group in the middle under the chandelier, Miss Fanny attended by Captain Poynder and Banquier, while the major came round the back of the piano.

"You must put your forehead on the top of the poker," said Miss Sophia, "then you turn round three times quickly and try to go out of the door."

"Bravo!" said Banquier, sardonically.

"Oh, do try, Mr. Carlton!" cried the malicious Fanny, "or you, Captain Poynder."

"Captain Poynder can try later—we must all try. Now, Mr. Carlton! it is so amusing if it's properly done."

Down bent the wretched Carlton, and round he worked, kicking out his legs, and shinning the nearest of us. Then he stood up with glassy eye and went straight like an exaggerated stage drunkard at Mrs. Pearce, who had risen and watched him go round through her glasses as though he were some strange animal gyrating in a menagerie. She screamed with natural violence as he clutched her to save himself from falling.

We all laughed and applauded vociferously; so long as we hadn't to try ourselves, we found it quite as amusing as Miss Sophia predicted.

But we were all obliged to try in turn, all except the Rev. Nathaniel, who hastily betook himself to his study as the safest route to see if the soup was ready. None of us had much success except the captain, who did it and got out of the door as if that had been his ordinary means of exit all his life. As for me, I found myself giddily embracing Miss Fanny before I knew where I was.

And then Miss Barth and Mrs. Shine!—anything more frankly *bouffon* than the way those good women flopped and floundered, anything more stupendously grotesque than their earnestness, their passionate desire of showing us that though they were lofty in life and ideal they could also be as simple and easily amused as children, I never yet saw.

Mrs. Shine fell, of course, and looked like one of Mr. Punch's murdered wives as she lay full length on the carpet. While Mr. Williams, splitting with laughter, raised her, I felt inclined to cry in Mr. Punch's rapid, nasal accents of feigned grief and remorse—
"Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!"

As for Miss Barth, she went straight for the card-table, fell over Mrs. Martin, was sworn at by her (the most distinct "Damned fool of a woman!"), was screamed at by her ladyship, and rescued only by the doctor, who took her round her huge fluid waist and lifted her inanimate form off the card-table with a genial "Hold up, old girl!"

The only unmoved observer was Sir Arthur, who stuck to his hand, rapped and danced his fingers loudly on the table, and watched her with a malignant grin.

They would have tried again and again, I've no

doubt, only that the Rev. Nathaniel, who was getting tired of us and wanted to go to bed, came to the door and announced loudly that the soup was ready.

So our simple country party came to an end, and we all got our wraps, with dutiful thanks for a most enjoyable evening.

I walked out across the Green with the company, said good-night to Mr. and Mrs. Carlton, and turned off to the Redan with the major, Mrs. Pearce, Miss Harewood, Captain Poynder, and Banquier.

We stood talking and laughing some few minutes by the elm, and then Mrs. Pearce said, crossly, "Come, Fanny, it's quite time!" The ladies left us; Fanny, bright-eyed and gay, and Mrs. Pearce morose at the small amount of attention that had been paid her, while Banquier lurched off into No. 13, and Captain Poynder walked quickly across the Green to the Hall.

I strolled down with the major, and at his gate he turned and said, "Come in and have a smoke."

There was entreaty in his voice, as much as to say, "You know I can't sleep; come and bear me company in my intolerable weariness."

It was about half-past eleven; indeed, I remember hearing the church-clock strike the half-hour as we went up the steps.

It was the first time I had been in the house, and I entered it with some sense of curiosity. We went into the front room (the room I had first seen him in with Bundy) and I waited at the door while the major lit the candles on the mantel-piece. From the inside the room didn't seem so scantily furnished as from the outside; there was very little furniture, it is

true, but what there was was good and solid. The only decoration was a proof engraving of one of Sir Noel Paton's pictures—I fancy it's called "Excelsior"; a young knight in armor clambering painfully up an arduous mountain-path, his footsteps pointed out for him by an angel with a flaming sword.

"Mr. Bundy in bed?" I asked.

"Dear me, yes. He goes off at ten punctually, and can only be roused with the greatest difficulty at half-past eight."

Then he sighed, as though to add, "I wish I could sleep like that."

"Sit down," he said, briskly. "Let me give you a cheroot."

He opened a cupboard by the fireplace, and I had a view of a thin supply of glass and china. He brought out a cigar-box and handed it to me.

"Army and Navy stores?"

"Yes," he replied; "you'll find 'em pretty good. I don't smoke much, but I smoke nothing else."

We sat down and began to smoke in silence, and then the major threw back his head and laughed long and heartily. It did me good to hear him; it was a joyous outbreak from the major of thirty years ago, before the little rift had set in that for so long had made his laughter mute. He looked as he laughed something like a savage old Spanish captain of Alva's time, frankly amused at the absurdity of some captured Dutch soldier-boor.

If we all of us owe the Vegetarian ladies nothing else, at least we owe them thanks for occasionally making us laugh, even if they don't mean to. I

sometimes think that, when half the world is so dull, any one who makes us really and unaffectedly laugh should be decorated. They certainly decorate people for practices much less estimable in Paris.

We soon fell to talking of the party and the guests; the major, among other inquiries, seemed curious about the sudden appearance among us of Captain Poynder. He had never seen him before, and asked innumerable questions about him, as many as though he were himself a young lady anxious for his favor.

I judged it would be less suspicious if I were frank, so I began at once.

I said I knew Captain Poynder was very much smitten with Miss Fanny—in fact, had no doubt come after her back to Thorpe. I told him something of my interview with Sir Arthur at the Hall, and made it plain how much they were against the match; not at all, I hastened to explain (for the major was frowning), because of any objection to the young lady herself, but more on the ground of want of fortune.

“Aye,” said the major, puffing away, “that’s sensible enough.”

I went on, quietly and naturally, to say that I thought, for my part, Poynder was here on a wild-goose-chase, for that there was no wall so hard for a man to knock his head against as a girl’s indifference; hard enough, in all conscience, if there were no other rival in the field, but adamant in the presence of another who was actually favored.

“That’s so; very true,” puffed the major, voluminously.

Then, settling myself deeper in the chair, I proceeded to take Captain Poynder's part (in a sense) by saying that, until something was definitely settled between Mr. Banquier and Miss Harewood, no doubt he might just as well still keep on with his endeavors to please and win her; he couldn't do any harm, and he might ultimately do some good. Though, to be sure, I for my part very much wondered why the engagement hadn't been already announced, and that, if I were Mrs. Pearce, I should certainly bring Mr. Banquier at once to book (the old-fashioned asking him his intentions, in short), and either make him settle something definitely in the way of marriage, or keep Miss Fanny away from him. That was only fair for Miss Fanny's sake, I said; to say nothing of the kindness of cutting short Poynder's natural anxieties.

"The great difficulty, surely, in these cases," replied the major, thoughtfully, "is to know exactly when to put your foot down."

"Depend upon it, Major Ross, you can't put it down too early. You know what young men are. There's only about one in a hundred can be safely trusted to treat a girl with due consideration and care, to say nothing of chivalry. They will sometimes, if their love is hopeless, if only on the forlorn chance of one day winning hers; but if they know it's safe and returned, there's no knowing what devilry they mayn't be up to."

The major paused, his cheroot in front of his lips, his eyes on the blank fireplace.

"But you don't think Banquier's a bad fellow?" he asked, anxiously.

"I certainly don't think he's a particularly good one. How many of us are in the face of a strong temptation?"

The major sighed heavily and puffed away again.

"I know very little of him," I went on, "and what little I do know is, I admit, not much to my liking; so, of course, I may be prejudiced."

"Let's hope so," said the major, ruefully.

"But, after all, major, you don't want to know much of a man individually, do you? Isn't it always enough to know something of human nature?"

The major paused, and then he said, in rather trembling tones, "Still, if he were hopelessly to compromise the girl, or do her any injury, he could always be made to marry her, couldn't he?"

"What is the use of marriage on those terms?" I replied, remorselessly. The major sighed, and I went on:

"It can't form any real tie between people. It's beginning life together with a constant sore, the irritation of which time only does everything to increase."

"I say, sir!" demanded the major, suddenly, with some return of his old fierceness, "why do you talk like this, eh? Don't you suppose the poor girl can be trusted to look after herself? What damned nonsense it all is! Let's leave her alone and talk of something else, please."

"See here, major," I said, coolly; "you spoke to me about her first, didn't you, some weeks ago? You asked me in a manner to look after her, to see she wasn't thrown too much into Banquier's sole companionship."

"Well! and since then she hasn't been, not nearly so much, and I dare say we have to thank you for it."

"Yes, but though we mayn't see them walking about so much together alone, what's to prevent them meeting secretly?"

"How on earth can people meet secretly in a prying place like this?"

"People can meet secretly anywhere, if their minds are set on it. You know that very well."

"You'll end by making me angry," said the major, containing himself with difficulty. "Do you mean to suggest the child has no self-respect?"

"How many women have, when they're really in love? They think it an excuse for anything and everything. Their emotions govern them and carry them off just where they will. And then, consider this young lady's position; there's nobody here really to look after her."

"I won't talk of it any longer," replied the major, sternly. "It isn't any concern of either of us."

He paused only a few seconds, and then he said: "How in the name of goodness could they meet secretly? I don't see how it's possible."

"The school-house is never locked," I answered; "they might go and sit there after school hours. Or, what's to prevent Banquier stealing across the Redan and sitting up with her in their own drawing-room to any hour, after Mrs. Pearce has gone to bed?"

"Well, if he does, what of it?" said the major, doggedly; "it isn't any business of yours."

"Not much of mine, I admit," I said, slowly, "but it is of yours, or should be. You're her father."

The old man's cheroot was just going into his mouth; he stopped in his gesture, and in a few seconds his hand fell forward; then his head drooped on to the back of his hand, as though the smoke had got into his eyes. There was a few moments' most painful pause, and then he nearly broke my heart by beginning to cry.

Is there anything so dreadful in this world as an old man's tears? It wasn't that he wept as men sometimes will, in brief passionate outbursts, shaken to the diaphragm; he cried as a child cries, from the eyes, weak and piteous.

"My God! My God!" he moaned, softly, wearily to himself.

He straightened himself and rose, went to the window, and stood there some few minutes drying his eyes.

"How did you know?" he asked at last, in the pitiful accents of a repentant child. "Does any one else?"

I told him how it had come about, and added that, so far as I knew, no one in the place even guessed.

"What I have suffered these last few months," he said, standing at my back, where the room was darker, "no one can conceive."

"Did you come here on purpose to be near her?"

"No, sir, no; by the merest chance. My wife died eighteen months ago, and, sick to death of Red-car, where we'd lived so long, I thought I'd come and spend the summer near Tom. I had no idea my daughter was anywhere but in London or abroad, and I hadn't been here a fortnight before she came.

She went past my window one afternoon suddenly, and I thought it was the spirit of her dead mother."

He came and sat down again, and for some time was silent.

"I scarcely knew what to do," he went on at last. "My first impulse, of course, was to leave at once. And then I remembered she had always been brought up in the belief I was dead. Mrs. Pearce had never seen me; years ago I had changed my name, when we first went to Redcar, before I was in the position to marry again. Painful as it was, there was a terrible fascination in being so near my child, in daily seeing her. I should just have stayed on here till Tom's holidays and never made a sign. Then Miss Kearsley came, who had known us so well when we were at Exeter. She recognized me at once and spoke to me, as you know."

"Didn't she think you ought to tell your daughter?"

"Yes, sir, she did; but what was to be gained by it? How could I expect Fanny to have any feeling for me after what I have done? How was I to explain, what was I to say about Tom? I ought to have gone away, of course, but I couldn't! I had loved her dearly as a child, had so often thought of her, wondered what she was growing like. Ah! it has all been part of the same weakness and irresolution that has ruined my life—ruined my life—ruined my life."

We sat a long time talking of the past and of the future. It was a difficult position, no doubt, horribly complicated as it was by Tommy. But was that any reason for denying Fanny her father? Surely she had the prior claim on him.

"That's all very well," said the major, "but what does she lose if she doesn't even know of my existence?"

"Your protection, of course! A man is wanted here, major, to put a stop to this long-drawn-out flirtation. If you don't think it wise to speak directly to your daughter herself at present, I think you should get hold of Mrs. Pearce at once and definitely use your authority there."

"You know what sort of woman she is, utterly incapable of any sort of reticence."

"I don't see how you can stop to think of that," I said; "clearly some one ought to interfere, or Miss Fanny will be made the laughing-stock of the village."

"You can't have a very high opinion of women, I'm afraid, or you wouldn't think she needed all this looking after."

"Don't you know an instance, perhaps, Major Ross," I retorted, "where things might have been different if only a daughter had been better watched?"

I had said my say, and, as it was growing late, rose to go.

The major looked at me fixedly. "I don't altogether understand you," he said. "You're a young man, and it's very unlike a young man to take such a high moral tone about what on the face of it is a perfectly innocent flirtation. It isn't possible you know anything to the discredit of these young people?"

"Prevention is better than cure, Major Ross," I answered, evasively; "one doesn't want to be very old to grasp the truth of a proverb."

Without another word the major took the candle off the mantel-piece and led the way into the narrow passage to the front door.

Outside, at the angle of the stair, stood an old eight-day clock, and he raised the candle to look at the time. The clock had stopped, and, still in silence, mechanically he gave me the candle to hold, and opening the case began to pull up the weights.

It was an ancient piece, and, warrior with the time that it was, had only one hand. The name of the maker was written on the pale china face, with fantastic flourishes — *William Whittick, Uxbridge*— and suddenly I remembered that was the name on the sundial at the Hall. Thinking of the doctor, I found I couldn't help smiling.

The major wound up the clock and turned to me to ask the time. I thought I heard the faint striking of the hour from the church. I said, "There's something striking now." The major, who was coughing a little, stopped and held his breath.

Tired and worn, dropped thinly three quarters into the great gulf of time. There must have been another stroke I missed, for afterwards (the silence broken only to my ear by the rheumatic wheezing of the clock, wheezing as though its works were cased in flannel) came the hollow beat of *one*.

For my part, I had thought it was the three quarters only and made a movement, but the major put a rigid arm out on mine and gripped me tight.

When the hour struck he still held my arm, and looking at him, I saw he was listening intently. The lines on his forehead were high and ridged, the lips drawn tight, almost into a grin. The candle-light

that flickered made his expression changeful, filled the long, deep wrinkles and folds of flesh now with shadow and now with gleam.

Suddenly he let go my arm and went straight to the front door. There, with his hand on the handle, he turned towards me and nodded his head violently, angrily at the candle. His lips moved, but no sound came. I felt as though I had suddenly been struck deaf ; for the moment I didn't even hear the ticking of the clock.

Pouf! I blew the light out. The passage was nearly dark, lit only by a skylight over the front door, swung half open. The clock by the stair foot came back to my senses, wheezed more heavily even than before.

A pale gleam broke along the passage wall, and I saw the major was opening the door. He stood there some few minutes cautiously peering out to the left towards No. 5. Whatever it was—the scrape of gravel, the click of a handle, the soft, mysterious closing or opening of a door—certainly I, too, heard something.

The major looked back at me, seemed to call me, and I came to him on tiptoe.

He was trembling violently. “Go across to that—that villain’s,” he said. “Be quick! see if he’s there. I’m going to Fanny’s.”

“Oh, but take care!”

“Be quick!” he chattered, pulling me by the arm.

I went across the Redan as noiselessly as I could to Banquier’s. The little gate was half open, and I went up the steps. I found the front door unfastened, and, as I went into the passage, could see, half

over my shoulder, the major going swiftly, avengingly, noiselessly along the palings and in at the gate of No. 5.

I left the front door open to give me light, and went down the passage to the sitting-room. As I opened the door the night breeze that came through the open window lifted broad leaves of white paper off the table with a ghostly sweep and courtesy, and strewed them along the floor.

There was light enough for me to see about the room. There was a bottle and glass and a jug of water on the table, and on the mantel-piece several pipes. All were cold but one—one was still tolerably warm.

It was one of those close June nights of suppressed moonlight, when the sky is all a haze of gray-hued crape, and earth looms large and dim and mistily vague. I looked across the square and saw the major at the head of Mrs. Pearce's steps, just opening the front door and peering in down the passage. I left the room quickly and went up the stairs. I reached the landing at the top and found Banquier's bedroom handle, and, as I was turning it, heard the creak of a bed in the back room, and the landlady groan and mutter as she turned, sleepless. Sleepless Mrs. Pope, on this hot summer night !

I stood breathless for a minute and then stepped in. The window was closed, the blinds were down, the room was very dark. I put my hand on the pillow and then on the bed. There was no one there.

As I left the room and turned to go down the stairs, the bed creaked from the room opposite.

Then it stopped, and Mrs. Pope called, sharply, "Is that you, sir?"

I answered "Yes" cheerfully, under my breath, and added a faint "All right" as I passed down the stairs, down the passage, and out of the front door.

Just as I went down the steps, through the open door of No. 5 came Banquier and the major; he had him by the collar, pushing him forcefully in front of him. Neither uttered a sound, and they slid down the steps and along into the Redan like spectres.

I stepped out of the gate and faced them by the great elm; the major was beating the young man heavily about the head and neck with his closed fist. Banquier was struggling and whispering sibilantly. Then he swore out loud.

The major shook him violently, growling and snarling like a tiger, and gave him finally a savage blow that fell on his open face. It seemed half to stun him, and with a stiff push the major thrust him from him. Banquier fell on the seat, and there lay sidelong, with his head in the curve of his arm.

I came quickly between them, and said, warningly, to the major, "Take care! they're awake in his house."

The major was breathing in short, quick snatches and staring at the heavy figure on the seat. I never saw murder in a man's face before, but I saw it in his—in the hard, glaring, relentless eyes, the knotted forehead, the curved, revengeful mouth, the thin, clutching fingers that tried to put me aside and reach his foe.

I held him fast by the wrists, and whispered, "Major! major! for God's sake!"

How long we stood I can't tell. I heard nothing but the grinding of the gravel under our feet, the night breeze in the elm.

Then Banquier, who was bareheaded and in his smoking-suit, sat up. I heard him shuffling as he pulled down his rumpled jacket.

The major gradually ceased struggling with me, and then, half dazed, looked down hard into my face as if to see who was holding him back from his just revenge.

"Let me go!" he snarled, furiously. "I won't touch him; I tell you I won't touch him."

I released him, and he walked straight up to Banquier, who was passing his finger across his cut lip.

"To-morrow!" said the major, bending down to him, grinding his teeth. "Do you hear me? To-morrow!"

Banquier looked first at the major's feet and then, with a stupid, stunned half-turn of the head round, up into his face. He made no reply, and the major shook him by the collar. "Do you hear me?"

He gave half a grunt and half a groan, and the major left him. As he was going towards his own house he saw the door of No. 5 was still open. He pointed it out to me imperiously. "Shut that door!"

I went quickly up the steps and shut the door. Before I shut it I listened. Not a sound in No. 5, nor the glimmer of a light; only the coarse blackness down the passage of the entrance to a hill-tomb in Nubia.

When I came back the major was gone. Banquier was sitting on the seat, his head between his hands, his elbows on his knees.

"You'd better go quietly to bed," I said.

There was nothing more I could do, and I went out of the Redan, past the forge, across the edge of the Green, past the rectory, the chapel, and the doctor's, towards my farm.

It had all passed so quickly I scarcely could believe it had occurred, scarcely could fancy I was doing anything else than walking home straight from the major's. Only my fingers were still stiff with holding the old man's wrists, and my cuffs were bent and crumpled, to assure me of what had really passed.

As I went by the pond there came, not quite a rift in the high gray quilt of cloud, but a patch where the wind had shredded it to lawn, and the moon shone through, pale and ghastly, on the white summer road. The shadow of the trees moved, and changed, and swayed under my feet, a witches' dance accompanying me of unholy delight.

I lifted my latch. A cock from the village gave clarion summons to the night to have done, to the shy, disastrous moonlight to be gone.

Morning will soon be with us now; the morning that holds the major's whispered vengeful *To-morrow!*

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAJOR'S DEMANDS—BANQUIER AT BAY—FANNY IN THE RIVER

TO-MORROW is here. I write my journal now after tea, now that the day has settled down to its long golden afternoon. The whole sky seems sun. How the poor towns-people must be sweltering in the clubs and Piccadilly, in their tall hats and varnished boots! *Une vraie chaleur de Sénégal.*

The early morning was still fresh and jubilant as Mr. Bundy came to me for our work at ten o'clock.

"Good-morning, Bundy."

I've dropped the Mr., in the hope it would make him feel easier with me.

"Good-morning, sir."

He looked at me wistfully. "The major's in a very bad way this morning, sir."

I looked at him closely to see how much he knew. His eye is always so tired and dispirited (the exact converse of Rosalind's acute, womanly-delighted "*He looks successfully!*") that nothing new and troublous can have power further to darken it.

"Has he sent any message? Does he want to see me?"

"Yes, sir, if you can go round there at your convenience."

So I set Bundy to his task, and after I had written a note or two, walked over to the Redan.

Peace, delicious sun and shadow in the Redan, and from No. 5 the slumberous sound of Fanny at her piano. She was playing one of the *Promenades d'un Solitaire* of her favorite Heller.

I found the major rather cool and masterful than upset. I saw at once it would be my duty to be his *galloper* for the day, and carry orders to all parts of the field.

He began at once: "I'm glad you've come, very. Now I want you to be good enough to go across to that—to the—opposite," he said, with a gulp, "and bring him with you to Fanny's. This must be all settled immediately, or we shall have him bolting."

"You won't want me to come, too?"

"Yes, please. You saw what happened last night, and I want you to see everything to-day. Besides, I don't know how far I may be able to control myself; I don't, really!" he added, with a break in his voice.

"But that poor girl—"

"I can't help that!" said the major, impatiently. "It's too late to think of all those things. I haven't a friend in the place except you, and you're her friend too."

"Do you suppose they know what's happened?"

"I don't see how they should. I caught the fellow in the drawing-room hiding behind the curtains, like the thief he is! Now go, please."

Calmly Fanny still plays her *promenade* as I went across to Mr. Banquier's. As I passed I saw he was in his room, sitting smoking, with his back to the

window. I rang the bell and inquired for him, and Mrs. Pope showed me in to him at once.

He didn't attempt to rise at my entrance, but just looked up at me and then down at the bowl of his pipe, into which he tucked his little finger.

"Good-morning," he said, defiantly.

"Mr. Banquier, Major Ross will be glad if you will go across to him at Mrs. Pearce's as soon as you conveniently can."

"What business is it at all of his?" was the sullen reply.

His lip was a good deal swollen; I think smoking must have further pained and irritated him.

"I understand you will be told when you go there."

"And if I refuse?"

"Major Ross scarcely thought that possible."

"And you?" he asked, still without looking up at me.

"Nor I either, after what has occurred."

He paused, sucking at his pipe, and then he rose impatiently.

"If all this hasn't quite the issue you both expect," he said, putting his pipe on the mantel-piece and stretching out his arms to each of the ends of it, "you mustn't blame me. Major Ross has interfered between us most unwarrantably"—he was looking at me covertly in the glass—"he will find Miss Harewood just as difficult to deal with. I warn you both."

Then he took his straw hat, and, opening the door, waited for me to go out first.

The piano playing had ceased at No. 5, and I knew

the major had arrived. We went across the Redan together in silence and up Mrs. Pearce's steps. Dumb rage possessed him. How unwieldy, coarse, and brutal he looked in his striped tennis flannels as he tumbled into the house without ringing, lumbered down the passage, and pushed the drawing-room door open! It was already slightly ajar, and, pushing it wide open, he stood there for a few seconds, holding it by the edge, looking at Fanny.

She stood facing him by the piano, gazing at him with wide, frightened eyes and mouth a little open. She wore an old-fashioned muslin frock with a figured sprig of lilac on it; it had been many times washed, and the pattern was growing faint, but she shone through it very sweet and girlish, with a fresh sash round her waist that hung with long streamers down her side.

The major was standing with his back to the fireplace. His lip went up as Banquier came into the room and his teeth gleamed ominously.

Mrs. Pearce, in a crumpled morning wrapper, sat near him, with gold *pince-nez* and *The Queen*; she wore a look of what she judged to be high-bred indignation at so early an intrusion by comparative strangers. She would have borne it all better, I believe, if only we had given her time to make a toilette. Her attitude all through seemed to say, "This is all very dreadful, no doubt; but not half so dreadful for me as being discovered in this old wrapper."

What the major had said in explanation of his intrusion I don't know; something, I believe, to the effect that he would explain the grounds of his in-

terference later, but that interfere now, at once, he meant to.

Mr. Banquier stepped in and stood there in the middle by the small rosewood table, with his hand on it.

There was a brief silence, broken by Fanny's tremulous "Good-morning, Frank." I turned from the window looking into the Redan and saw how pitia- bly white she had suddenly become under the sun- burn.

Without noticing her Banquier turned to the major, and said, harshly, "Why am I sent for? What do you all want?"

"The idea!" cried Mrs. Pearce, irritably. "Fanny, come here!"

But Fanny didn't heed her. She put out her slim brown hands with a hapless gesture and moved to Banquier's side. She slid her hands down his arm till they grasped his fingers; she raised his hand in both of hers and held it passionately to her bosom. Her eyes were tragic and hollow as she looked up into his heavy, scowling face.

"They sha'n't annoy you, Frank," she whispered, tremulously. "It will all come right. We must be patient, that's all."

"Well, what do you all want?" reiterated Ban- quier.

"You've been sent for," said the major, in tones impossible to describe, they were so concentrated and acrid, "by me. You are going to be told what we want."

"Oh?"

The major came to the table, and, putting his thin,

nervous hand on it, glared across within a foot of Banquier's impassive face. I thought his aggressiveness unwise, seeing the man he had to deal with.

"You are going to make an offer of marriage to this young lady," he cried, "now, with us as witnesses. She is going to accept you, and we, her friends, are going to settle the day."

"Is that all?" replied Banquier, with a short half-laugh.

"That is all, sir," said the major, drawing himself up and trembling, "for the present."

Then there was a pause, and then Banquier went on coldly, "You're not very wise, Major Ross, to take this sort of line with me. I am not the man to be driven to anything. I won't be ordered."

"We shall see that! Go on."

"Useless. I won't be ordered."

"Do you deny your obligations?"

"I deny nothing."

"Do you refuse to fulfil them?"

"Not at all! But it must be at my own time."

"Your own time! That will be never, if we leave you alone," snarled the major. "I know the sort of man you are."

"Then it will be wise of you to treat me as such. And, after all, by what right do *you* interfere?"

"By the right of every honest man who only does his duty when he checkmates a scoundrel."

Banquier remained still impassive, and said, "Even a scoundrel can't very well be forced to perform what may turn out to be an impossibility."

The major started, drew back, and then, bending

over the table again, demanded, with a horrid face of apprehension, "How?—an impossibility!"

"What I say—an impossibility."

"But how? how?"

Banquier gave an impatient gesture, and tried to draw his hand from Fanny's poor little feverish ones. She only held it the closer to her tortured bosom, and looked the more searchingly and fearfully up into his face. I could see a pulse beating in her throat like a caged bird.

"What fools you all are!" cried Banquier, with a burst of rage, snatching his hand away. "Why do you dare put us both in this shameful position!" He gave a sort of half-sob, half of rage and half of grief.

"It's been your own doing!"

"Me, perhaps! Take me aside and talk to me, but not before her. Surely you can spare her?"

"We're thinking of her, and her only," cried the major, interrupting him before he had half finished. "You can set her right, and by God you shall!" He smote the table furiously with the back of his hand. "I don't believe in your impossibilities. It's a lie! there are none, except of your own wilful making!"

"Frank!" said Fanny, trembling, her lips dry, "I would never have spoken, you know that! I would never have asked you for anything you didn't freely offer, you know I wouldn't! but now, dear, that our love for each other is known, hadn't you better—won't it be well—"

She paused, poor child. Her voice died away in dry, soundless whispers.

Banquier, unhappy man, dropped his head in his

hands and groaned ; such a groan as I never heard issue from human lips but once before—once when, at the Old Bailey, I saw a poor wretch of a doctor take the jury's awe-struck verdict of *Guilty!* of murder—a groan so terrifically deep that it seemed to rise from below his feet and rend its way with a muffled volley as through the funnel of a horn, through his very being.

“Frank!” she whispered, frightened, “it’s a shame ; but speak, dear, won’t you ? speak, *please!*”

He tore himself from her convulsively and turned to the door, haggard and altered.

I think the major believed he was going to escape, and made a movement round the table as if to intercept him.

Mrs. Pearce gave a frightened, old-womanish cry, and Fanny moved her head vacantly, looking from the major to Banquier, and back again, in silence, demanding as her due an explanation of the mystery.

Banquier put his hand on the door and, with his left clinched, turned to the major.

“It’s been mostly your doing,” he cried, “your infernal interference ! You have watched, and sneaked, and imagined ; you have put ideas into my head that never would have come there but for the pleasure of outwitting you. If you’d left us alone to go our own way, if you hadn’t constituted yourself a spy—”

“You lie again !” screamed the major ; “you came down here intending it.”

“I intended nothing—nothing !”

“It’s a lie !—a lie !”

“You will have it ! you goad me on ! I tell you I

can't marry her—I'm married already! Make the best you can of that, you fools!"

Before the shock of his brutal speech had made itself felt, he was out of the room and we heard the front door slam. A pause while he hurried across the Redan, and then the slam of the door opposite.

Among us, for the moment, there was silence—silence in that trim, bright room, full of sunshine and the summer. It seemed the more shocking, this day enamelled in its morning glory, blue and white and gold, like some rare old missal, in contrast with the misery among us.

The major was twitching dreadfully.

I looked at the unhappy Fanny; she threw back her head, her mouth contracted dolorously, she beat herself, once, twice, with her small fists between the breasts. Then her head sank forward; I caught sight for an instant of the upward curve of the long eyelashes before she fell on her knees by the side of the table, stretching her hands over it, drooping her pretty head on the smooth, dandy surface.

Mrs. Pearce rose, with a vexed "Dear! dear! Fanny!"—still grasping her paper; the major gave a smothered cry, and made as if he would follow Banquier.

I intercepted him. "You stay here," I said, "and help her. I'll see after him."

I left the room and went immediately across to No. 13. As I crossed the Redan, from the old Quaker meeting-house, I heard the shrill singing of the children; it was the hymn they always sang before the morning recess of twenty minutes. Soon the Redan would be echoing with their rapture, and

they would be tumbling over the blunt, nameless graves of the burial-ground.

Banquier was walking up and down the sitting-room, his hands in his pockets. He turned to look at me, and with a shrug went on walking.

I had come across without having had time to think what I was going to say, and he, apparently, had nothing whatever to say to me.

At last he muttered something, and made as though he would leave the room.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Mr. Banquier?" I asked.

"What should I have to say to you?" he replied, defiantly.

"Would you rather say it to the major?"

"Or to him? What has my conduct to do with either of you?"

"It has everything to do with him. He's her father."

Banquier stared at me, and drew his hands out of his pockets. He whispered an imprecation softly to himself, and looked away from me across the Redan.

His face contracted, and his deep-set eyes blinked and filled with tears while I briefly told him the major's story. When I had finished there was another long pause.

"Her father?—poor old man!" at last he sighed. "Poor old man! Ah, if we had only known!"

He sat down in the easy-chair by the window, and I came and sat beside him.

"Tell me," I asked, "what is this about your marriage? Is it one from which you are never to be

free, seeing that, apparently, you don't live with your wife?"

He looked at me, and then said, drearily, "She's shut up. There was madness in her family. I never knew it. They kept it from me purposely. She may live for years. She's only eight-and-twenty now.

"You hear of such things, don't you?" he went on; "but you scarcely believe them possible. I suppose they thought me something of a catch; I have seven or eight hundred a year, and she had nothing. I suppose they thought that, although there was madness in the family, it needn't necessarily show itself in her. But they might have told me, and given me the choice, don't you think? All the same, I dare say I should have married her and risked it. I was very much in love. I was only four-and-twenty.

"That's seven years ago. When her baby was born the madness showed itself. The doctor hoped she would recover. She got worse; she tried to kill the child. She couldn't bear the sight of me. We were obliged to shut her up. Every year the lucid intervals grow rarer; now they tell me she's quite hopeless. Otherwise she's perfectly well; she may live for fifty years. The child's with my mother in Guernsey," he added; "I suppose when her time comes she'll go mad, too."

He rose with a sigh, and went on walking about the room.

From the Redan came the laughter and cries of the children, shrill as young swallows. They were climbing over the seat, they were playing hide-and-

seek in and out of the burial-yard, round the great elm.

"What poor devils we all are!" cried Banquier. "All of us in some sort of an *impasse*; all of us *limèd souls that struggle to be free!* Look at the children; happy now, because they've not yet been trained to think, because they've not yet come in touch with life and its hopeless wretchedness. A few years hence, and not one of them, boy or girl, but will be tortured by something: want of money, or distress of love, or loss of character, or the deprivation of some one thing which alone can make life bearable.

"You know it yourself!" he said, fiercely, standing over me. "Look into your own heart! Confess that every dream you ever cherished has been a dream and nothing more; that every hope has gradually been sapped and ruined; that every morning you wake, you wake to old dissatisfaction the new day does nothing, can do nothing, to alleviate."

"Oh, never mind me!"

"But you can't deny it!"

"Yes, I can deny it, and do, utterly," I said, impatient with his rather theatrical tirade. "For mercy's sake, don't let us talk of ourselves. Let us think of her. What in the name of Heaven is to become of her?"

"She must come with me," said Banquier, dully. "We must go abroad. She must wait for the chance of my one day being free."

"Her father will never permit it, never."

"Her father! Oh, of course! one knows what to expect from the morality of an old sinner."

"But Miss Harewood has other relatives and friends."

"Well, I shall outwit them. She'll come if I call, you may depend on that. What other course is there left open to us, pray?"

"And is it that you've been scheming for all along?"

"Don't you understand," groaned the unhappy man, "I've been scheming at nothing? Don't you know how, without having an idea where one's going, one drifts and drifts—"

"No, I don't; nor you either; nor any man of average intelligence. Don't talk any such specious nonsense to me, if you want me to listen with any show of patience. To talk of drifting is the merest cant. Directly drifting begins, every man knows perfectly well where he's going."

He stood looking down at me, his face working, and then he went on.

"When I first met her, it was only as I've met other charming girls whom I've talked to at at-homes and parties and never seen again. I never sought her society, never tried to meet her in any way, never suggested she should meet me. But there are some people, aren't there, whom chance is throwing constantly in your way—whom you meet, as it were, in spite of yourself—"

"But did you make any effort to avoid her?"

"Why should I? I wasn't in love with her; she wasn't in the least in love with me. If you sit next a pretty woman at dinner, you don't open the conversation by saying, 'Excuse me, I must leave you. You have a strange attraction for me. I know you

are beginning to like me; I am not free; I must be off!' Why, she'd think you just what you would be—a crazy coxcomb."

"But why didn't you confine yourself to your at-homes and parties? Why did you come down here?"

"Why not? I had met her perhaps half a dozen times in London, and we were friendly, absolutely nothing more. I swear, when I came here, I wasn't in love with her; I swear I made no attempt to make her in love with me. We had talked and laughed, just as young people ordinarily do, but that was all. She asked me about myself, I told her I wrote; that in the season I generally went away somewhere, as I found it impossible to work in town. 'Oh, do come to Thorpe,' she said, 'and work there. It will be such fun, and you can tell me all about your book as it goes on.'"

"You surely knew to what it was all likely to lead?"

"No, I never thought about it—not in that way."

"Oh, if you won't stop to think!"

"I only thought she was a very nice girl; that if I did go anywhere, I might as well go where I should know some one—in fact, I expected when I got here to find her with half a dozen young men at her heels, any one of which she would be sure to prefer to me."

"You never told her anything about yourself, about your wife?"

"Why should I? One doesn't begin an acquaintance by volunteering that sort of thing. Besides, I supposed she knew. The people at whose houses I met her in London all knew."

"But later? When you knew she loved you?"

"I never knew it till quite, quite recently."

He made a gesture of hopelessness, as much as to say that then it was too late.

"You see," I said, "there was plenty of time for you to have done your duty, and yet you didn't choose to do it."

He sat down, and bent forward towards me earnestly.

"Let me assure you of this, however," he said, "that when I first came here I had no thought of ever falling in love with her, not the faintest. I thought it quite impossible for me ever to be in love again. After that dismal tragedy with my wife, something within me had seemed to snap, the power of caring for any one seemed gone. It had lasted for six years. Wasn't I justified in thinking it would never come back?"

"But you should have thought of what she might be likely to do."

"But I am not a coxcomb! I have never been a favorite with women; I had never even been in love till I met my unhappy wife. It was a long time, two years at least, before I got her to care anything about me. When she married me, I believe she only took me as a *pis-aller*, and because her people bothered her. Wasn't I justified in thinking I could be in the same village with a girl without my falling in love with her, without her ever falling in love with me?"

"But when both those catastrophes happened, surely your course was perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly clear now!" groaned Banquier, "but not perfectly clear then! It all came upon me so

suddenly, too, at the last. So we went on, and each day it became harder. I would say, 'I'll tell her to-night, or now, before we reach that gate; or I'll write to her and go away, and see if she'll have the courage to follow me!' Why, till just lately I didn't believe I was in love; I only knew I liked being with her."

And so on, and so on, and so on; special pleading all of it, I dare say, but (in default of hearing the other side) none the less effective and convincing—at any rate, for the time.

Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner. I felt sympathy, even a measure of forgiveness gaining me. It was the *argumentum ad hominem*, I suppose—the "what would you have done in my place?"—we all of us find so irresistible.

So, I imagine, if we get close to most human tragedy, we shall find in it all the elements of pity and excuse; more especially if we allow the protagonist to re-enact it.

In conclusion I said, "And you think that in a sense the major has been to blame for all this?"

"Oh, in a sense, in a sense," replied Banquier, fretfully. "His spying made us both take pleasure in outwitting him, in being secret. Fanny was always laughing at him. He is certainly so far to blame now, that if there is any publicity or scandal it will be all his fault."

When I left him and passed out of the Redan, I saw the Carltons driving away to catch their train at Warford for town and the Fulham Road, with the luggage piled on the top, even to the bath covered in canvas. They were both so wrapt up in the baby,

sitting on the back seat in the little nurse-maid's lap, that they never saw me.

For the first time, as I passed the doctor's and the rectory, I noticed how the early freshness of summer was over. The fire of the hanging laburnum was blackened, the lilac and the thorn were wan and shrivelled, the apple blossom transformed into the stiff leaf coronal of fruit.

When I got back to the farm Bundy was just leaving it, on the completion of his morning's task. It seemed to me years since I had last seen him.

After Supper.

Past the farm, a few hundred yards only, there's a green rutted lane winds away from the by-road that passes my window, stealing its leisurely way towards Oxford.

The green lane goes nowhere in particular, after the manner of such, but soon ends in a gate and a cornfield, where there always seems to be more yellow charlock than corn.

It's the haunt of the gypsy. Most weeks there's been a caravan there, and there's always the remains of a fire scattered about and a tin or two, and sometimes an old boot or a trampled crape bonnet.

Half-way down this green lane a gate opens into a meadow that falls away to the river-bank, fringed with pollard willows; not the great river, the sweet, luxuriant Thames of Marling Bridge, but a humble little silvery tributary, brimful of quiet charm, that creeps with a reticent murmur down from some distant Berkshire hill and steals its patient, gentle way past many a retired hamlet and secluded village till it joins

the river, not far from the bridge; taking its hand, as it were, and sweeping along with it, the larger partner, down to Westminster and the sea.

Often when I am not sitting in the Redan, or playing tennis, or sturdily walking abroad, often I stroll down the by-road to the lane, and across the meadow to the willows.

There's one of them has a comfortable hollow that just fits my back, and there I have often sat with my book, looking at the lilies and the water; and not a sound to disturb me but the *d-lop* of the water-rat, and the sometime dripping *hish-hish* of the not-too-busy mill.

The river is deeper here where it curves, and the mill is just opposite. I believe it was once attached to the priory at Dorchester; monks always had their mill as they had their stewponds. It is very old and picturesque and almost useless, I fear, nowadays when so much of our corn comes to us ready ground from America. It isn't very often at work; this evening the great black wheel, with water-weeded green flanges, was silent and dry.

The river there is perhaps twenty yards across. There's no bridge for miles, but the miller keeps a punt for intercourse with Thorpe, and by its being fastened to my bank I judged him to be visiting in the village, gossiping with the Westons, or sitting in the "Red Cow" bar-parlor; to which, in default of business, he is somewhat addicted.

They usen't always to have the punt. I remember Mrs. Chick telling me the Thorpe cobbler was wont to take the miller's boots, when he'd mended them, and throw them across from bank to bank;

and the money for the job was hurled to him from the other side, wrapped in paper, and weighted with a stone.

A pleasant and simple picture, I thought, of riparian intercourse, lasting down to only the other day.

There I was sitting this evening, facing the water, with my back tucked into the accommodating willow, reading Stendhal's diary, when he was making believe to be a soldier with the army of Italy, and fixing with his sombre, dissatisfied eyes the Milanese young ladies.

I hadn't liked to go into the Redan, I couldn't or wouldn't do any work, and so I had just taken my book and strolled off down the green lane and across the meadow to my willow.

Suddenly, as I was reading (I must have been there about an hour, reading with the wrapt attention Stendhal always exacts), there began to mingle with the words a faint and steady—*swish—swish—swish*.

It sounded something like a scythe rapidly at work, only that it grew louder, came so quickly nearer.

I heard no footstep, but I had scarcely realized the sound's distinctness before I knew it must be a woman's dress; a lady's, for it was the rustle of either a silk petticoat, or what they call, I believe, a silk foundation.

As it came quite unmistakably close, I leaned forward on my elbow and looked out from my shelter away to the right.

There, twenty or thirty yards away, and not half a dozen yards from the river-bank, which here, at the

bend, is pretty steep, came Miss Harewood, walking straight and steadily towards the water. She was gloveless, wearing a straw hat and a different dress to the one of the morning. Her head was raised, and she was staring in front of her, not quite up at the sky, but more at the trees behind the mill on the opposite bank.

There could be no doubt of what she was bent on doing. I had only just time to get on my feet before she was in the river.

She didn't seem to jump, but more to throw herself off the bank, rather sideways (as though her resolution failed her at the last moment, or possibly because she saw me and I startled her), on to the surface of the creeping water, which there runs swiftly. The last I saw before she disappeared was the pouf of her dress where the air filled it. Then it collapsed like a pricked balloon, and she went right under.

I knew the current must carry her past me, and I ran and unfastened the punt. I jumped in and pushed it off mid-stream with the long pole, and she rose not three yards away, hatless, her dripping hands first and then her wet, frightened face, with the hair loose all round it.

She looked straight into my eyes, and gave a sort of choking, gurgling cry. Just as she was sinking again she drifted alongside, and I bent over and clutched her tight by the elbow. The punt was turning round, and I was leaning so far over it nearly upset, for Fanny was beginning to struggle violently.

"Don't be frightened!" I cried. "I've got you tight; you're quite safe!"

She swung round with the back of her head against the punt, and I caught hold of her other arm.

I held her with the left hand, and with the right got hold of the pole. The water was deep and the pole so long I could not manage it at all. The current carried us twisting to the other bank, forty yards below the mill.

"Now," I said, "come, courage!"

I got her in, and she lay at the bottom of the punt, a slight, dripping, clinging figure. Her straw hat was just alongside, caught in the sedge, and I bent over and recovered it. Then I got my pole again, and, with a good deal of difficulty and unskilfulness, managed to reach our own bank.

I carried her out, and laid her tenderly down on the grass. She was lying there with her eyes closed, breathing quickly, her face on her arm, when I came back from fastening the punt to the stick the miller kept there.

I knelt beside her and took her hand. "Can you walk?" I asked, gently.

Her lips moved slightly, but no answer came that I could catch; so I got her in my arms (shall I ever forget the rather acrid smell of her wet clothes?) and carried her as best I could half-way across the meadow.

Then the gate out of the green lane opened, and the miller came through towards us, carrying a parcel.

"Here's somebody coming," I said; "do you think you can walk now?"

Again she murmured something I couldn't catch.

"We've had a little accident," I called, cheerfully, as the miller came closer.

"Dear! dear! Young lady been in the water?"

"She slipped in off the bank and it's frightened her."

"No doubt o' that," said the miller; "sure to. Dear! dear!"

He was carrying a hat in a paper bag from the draper's.

I knew him slightly; we had had some talk as to the wisdom of protecting English flour against the foreign commodity. "A measure o' protection," was the phrase he was always using—"a measure o' protection."

He offered to put down his paper bag and help us.

"No, no," Fanny whispered.

"It's all right, thank you," I said; "the young lady's as light as a feather. I'll get a wrapper or something at the Chicks'."

"Take care not to catch co-wold!" called the miller after us as I trudged on to the gate.

There I put her down, and she leaned against the gate, her face in her hands.

"I must rest a bit," I said, confidentially; "I'm quite out of breath."

"Don't cry!" for the poor child began to sob as if her heart would break; "you'll soon be home now and safe, and no one will know."

I bent, and wrung out her skirts, and then I gave her my handkerchief in silence, while she dried her face and put her hair back. I flipped the water off her hat and handed it her to put on.

"There!" I said, "you'll soon be all right now."

Come, we won't go near the Chicks'; I know a back way over the fields. No one 'll see us, and it don't matter if they do; you look as dry as a bone."

We went down to where the green lane joins the road, and left it to pass quickly through the orchard, and across the field behind the Chicks', she walking beside me in silence with her head bent.

I kept up a sort of chatter about the book I'd been reading, and how I should have to go back and fetch it presently, or the miller might add it to his library, and such like inanities.

She never said a word in reply; but just as we got at the back of the doctor's, and were nearing the Green, she said in a low voice, still with her head bent, "It was very, very wicked of me!"

I took her cold little hand in silence, and drew her closer to my side.

"Never again?" I asked.

"Never!" she whispered; "I promise. It's frightened me."

"Promise faithfully and I'll trust you."

"I promise faithfully," she whispered, and held my hand tight.

"Send for me if you want to see me at any time. I'm not going away."

"Yes," she whispered. "Will you let me go in alone, please?"

"You'd rather?"

"Yes, please."

I raised her hand and kissed it long and lovingly, as a brother might.

"Good - night, Fanny. God bless you! Hush! hush!" for she was beginning to sob again. "There's

nothing to cry about now you are sorry. Run along, and don't forget to send for me if you want to see me."

She walked quickly down the narrow passage between the rectory and the doctor's, her head bent, her skirts clinging to her.

I couldn't help a sob either—just one short, quick, stabbing one—as I watched her go.

Oh, Fanny! sister!

CHAPTER XIX

THE STORY OF THREE WEEKS — POOR FANNY'S LETTER

It's three weeks almost since I've had the heart to enter a line in my journal.

When I came here first in search of quiet, now more than two months ago, I thought of nothing but just recording the village humors; a light sketch or two of characters and oddities, just to amuse myself with when I wasn't at my law-book. I had turned my back for the time on London and its tragedies; if tragedy there might be in Thorpe, it could surely only be rustic and grotesque. "Boors in trouble" would surely be no less amusing than "Boors rejoicing."

But, alas! it seems useless to make up one's mind to go through life with ear tuned only to the Boc-caccio pitch; there's a ground base of pain will surge up—stern Dantesque accents, that end by drowning the lute and the sweet, careless voices of the love-worthy ladies.

I often wish my ear were more of the comic-receptive order; a tympanum echoing merely to Offenbach and Sullivan and Audran. What a blessing and relief it must be to be able to lounge through the day as though it were one long, non-moral Bur-

lington Arcade!—on the north the *Bouffes Parisiens*; on the south the Prince of Wales's and the Gaiety.

Well, if you can't you can't, and there's an end of it. It's useless pretending to be a light-hearted grig, Scaramouch, or Scapin, if Nature don't mean you to be one.

So I'll just begin where I left off, and make the best of it, cutting it all as short as possible, so as to save myself unnecessary pain.

Over the village of Thorpe and its shadowless Green, now burned up and fissured by the drought, these past three weeks there has brooded silence—silence in the long, brazen midsummer heats.

Each day has been remorseless companion to the last—cloudless, breezeless, scorchingly monotonous.

We have waited, almost panted for the rain, our summer's due, that has never come. Every morning the same keen sun-shafts have glided into my bedroom to wake me; they have fallen with the regularity of a dial on the sponge, and made it so hot and dry that at last I have been forced to move it over-night. Every morning at ten Bundy has come in sweltering, with the constant observation, "Very hot again to-day, sir."

It was the first morning after the appalling incident by the river that he brought word the major begged to see me as soon as possible. I went round to the Redan at once, and the major told me, with broken voice and tears in his eyes, that Fanny was very ill and the doctor with her. She was in a high fever and delirious.

I asked him what had happened after I had left

the room and gone across to Banquier's. He said Fanny had lain in a dead faint a long while; that, after he had brought her round, he had remained with her some time, and told her as gently as he could who he was and why he had interfered.

She had scarcely seemed to understand him, and plainly showed she was scarcely even listening. At last she said she wanted to go to her room and lie down, and he had left her in Mrs. Pearce's care.

In the evening he had gone there again, and found her tossing and moaning in fever. Mrs. Pearce had discovered the wet clothes and showed them to him.

Nothing was to be got from Fanny, but the major had guessed something of what must have happened. I told him my share in the sad attempt, and then his long-pent fury against Banquier broke out. I had to get in front of the door to prevent his going across there at once and half killing him.

Finally, after I had told him Banquier's story, he undertook to do nothing violent on the condition I saw him and ordered him out of the place immediately.

"But, at present," I argued further, "let us remember no one knows anything more than that Fanny slipped off the bank into the water. Nor is there any reason they should. Let Banquier stay on here a day or two, till she's better, and then go away on business. He can pretend he's coming back, and directly she's well enough you can take her right away somewhere. A little caution and a little judicious frankness, and a great deal of unnecessary gossip and trouble will be saved—at all events, so long as we are all here."

And that the major, after some further wild talk, gradually agreed to.

The good doctor has behaved throughout like a trump. What he told Miss Ryle I don't know, but the upshot of it was, as Fanny grew worse, Miss Ryle came across to the Redan, and, for the day or two her life was in danger, remained there as nurse without ever leaving the house.

Miss Sophia, who (for all her desperate air of intelligence) is stupidity itself, never guessed the true state of affairs—at any rate, at first—and helped the situation by her constant, unsuspecting, free cackling about the accident. She was always rustling backward and forward from the rectory with eggs and vegetables and talkative sympathy.

Fortunately, we were able to prevent her taking Miss Ryle's place by the bedside, as she wanted to, for the poor girl in her delirium raved constantly of Banquier and her wickedness in attempting her life.

The chief difficulty lay with Banquier. I saw him immediately after my interview with the major, and told him what had occurred, and the part it was decided he was to play.

When he heard of the river he burst into passionate tears and self-upbraiding. But nothing would induce him to think of going away—at all events, till Fanny was quite out of danger. So for days Banquier and the major and John Poynder were constantly meeting and crossing each other in the Redan.

The tragedy of that little square, where once I had seen only a sunny restfulness! How dusty and arid it seemed to me now, in the heat and the glare; after the first, early freshness of summer!

The Quaker school-house children were told the young lady at No. 5 was very ill, and no longer sang their morning hymn before the recess. They no longer romped round the elm at the play hour, but came and went in silence, hushed and sympathetic little figures.

From Mrs. Chick I heard something of the view the village took of the disaster. They evidently believed, so far, in the story of the accident; that was something to begin with. All I could expect was to prevent gossip so long as we were all in the place; some day or other everything must, of course, come out. Sooner or later everything always does; only now and again it's as well to put it off as long as possible.

The unhappy major's self-control was wonderful; once only his smouldering fires broke out.

It was late one afternoon, four days after her illness began, when Fanny was at her worst. I had gone to the Redan to inquire, and found him sitting, dumb with grief, under the elm.

After a time he began speaking of John Poynder, and the confidence the young man had made him of love for Fanny—in excuse, no doubt, for coming so often to ask after her. The major told me they had been thrown together a good deal the last few days, and, under a pledge of secrecy, he had thought it right to reveal his relationship. Poynder was quite impassive as he listened; he merely said he hoped that when Fanny was well again the major would have no objection to his speaking to her.

“I didn't know *what* to reply!” cried the major, distressed. “I *could* only tell him he must wait and

consult his friends. Then I thought of you, and I told him he had better come some day and talk it over with you, because you knew better than any one the terms on which Banquier and my daughter really were."

I could see how much he felt an added bitterness to his present trouble in the thought that, but for Banquier, his daughter might have taken a liking to a man who, from the father's point of view, was more or less of a desirable match for her.

Just at that moment, as we were quietly talking, Banquier came out of his house and down the steps towards us.

"How is Miss Harewood?" he asked, with a shade of his old defiance. There was a pause, while the major gave a sort of twitch with his arms and clasped his hands tight. I said she was still very ill.

"I am very sorry," said Banquier.

He came a little closer and added, "Wouldn't it be as well to send for further advice? There's a very clever doctor at Warford."

"Tell him to go away," whispered the major.

I was just saying we all had perfect confidence in Dr. Martin, and that all was going on as well, perhaps, as we had any right to expect, when John Poynder came into the Redan, and walked down behind us to the seat.

He came down on the major's left, and said, "Well, any better news?"

There was a brief silence, and then, "Poynder!" said the major, suddenly, clutching him by the arm and pointing at Banquier, "there's one of the biggest blackguards unhung! If you have any real love

for Fanny, thrash him within an inch of his life. He knows I'm an old man, or he wouldn't dare come within a mile of me."

Captain Poynder flushed scarlet, and, staring across at Banquier, began to try and unloose the major's tight clasp of his arm.

I rose and turned to Banquier. "Go away," I said, "at once, if you have any feeling left."

He gave one of his short, defiant laughs. "I'm not going to run away before any man or any threats."

Poynder was loose of the major, and stepped forward.

"Thrash him!" cried the major, malevolently. "Thrash him! kill him!"

Banquier gave his most irritating laugh.

What would have happened I don't know, but at that moment the girl from the cottage opposite my farm, the slatternly girl Fanny had used to visit and be kind to, came quietly down behind us.

She has been every day to inquire, and has always brought some little offering with her—flowers, or a little fruit out of their garden—anything to show her sympathy and distress.

She was carrying a cabbage-leaf piled with raspberries, and she said, "Please, gemmen, how is the young lady?"

Nobody answered her, while I whispered to Poynder, "Don't make any scenes here, just under her window. Go and sit down and let him get away."

He moved away, and I turned to the girl.

"You'd like to leave the fruit yourself, I dare say."

She nodded and whispered, awe-struck, "Oh, mister, she ain't going to die?"

After waiting a minute or two Banquier sauntered leisurely out of the Redan, and I came and sat by the major under the elm. The girl went up the steps of No. 5 and left her fruit, and then she humbly went away without looking at us, her thin face shocked and frightened.

The major rose and walked away quickly in silence; he went into his house, and I was left alone with Captain Poynder. He came and sat beside me with his elbows on his knees and his hands in his hair.

"Let me give you a word of advice," I said to him, presently. "Go back to Sheffield and your work. You can do no good here now."

"Not till I know the truth!"

"Let the truth come to you," I answered, vaguely. "It will come if you're patient, and at present we don't really know it. The only thing that is sure is, that so long as you remain here you embarrass us and are doing yourself no good. Depend upon it, she will one day be grateful to you the quieter you keep now."

There was a long pause, and then he said, "I'll go when she's out of danger, when she's better."

And for fear of his questioning me I rose and left him.

So a week passed, and Fanny was out of danger. The attack of fever had been sharp, but in proportion to its sharpness it had been short. All that was wanted now, surely, was rest and quiet and change of scene, and yet the doctor was reticent and guarded. I met him crossing the Green, grave and pre-

occupied, and all he would say was that the fever was gone and now we must hope for the best.

Later in the day Banquier came to see me.

"I'm going up to town in the morning," he said ; "will you kindly write me any news?"

He sat down and pencilled his address. "Let me say, finally," he said, "that I place myself unreservedly in your hands, and anything you think I ought to do, I of course will. Good-bye," he added, with the sound instinct of not offering me his hand.

Captain Poynder has not gone. I meet him occasionally wandering about disconsolately.

"I can't go away," he said to me once ; "I'm very sorry, but I can't. I want to see her again. I'm in nobody's way, am I? I'm sure I try not to be."

Another time I stopped and asked him, point-blank, "Tell me, what do you hope to gain by remaining on here?"

"I don't quite know," he answered, after a pause ; "and yet I begin to think I do. Only I can't bring myself to speak of it—at any rate, not yet."

Intense suffering was plainly marked on his beautiful, regular features. It gave him an interest, an attraction he had never had before. He was Hermes, travelling the painful road of Calvary ; the Greek god, being educated elsewhere than in the Gymnasium.

In all our trouble the village life goes on round us without a shade of difference. The boys play cricket on the Green ; there are the same figures on the railings and by the pond at dusk, the same occasional noisy revelry at the "Red Cow," the same occasional outbreaks in Bean's Row.

A few days ago Loisset's Circus passed through on their way to Warford. They dressed themselves up outside the village and came through in procession; the pinched, powdered ladies of the *haute école*, the dirty, painted clowns, the dusty elephants, the ringmaster, in his tight tail-coat, saluting from his prancing piebald. It was just the afternoon when Fanny was at her worst, and, in the heat, the braying band sounded like music from the Inferno.

The day Banquier left Miss Ryle was suddenly summoned up to town by her mother's illness.

I was sitting in the Redan when she came out of No. 5. It was growing late, and, as the shadows lengthened, it was at last growing cool. She looked anxious and worried as I rose to meet her.

"I have to go up to town," she said. "My mother's not very well, and they want me back, and, after all, I've been here longer than usual."

"Well, everything's going on all right, isn't it?"

"Will you walk back with me?" she answered, with some constraint. She didn't speak till we were outside the Redan, and then she said, shocked and tearfully, "Do you know Fanny knows no one?"

"You don't mean she's still delirious?"

"Not at all; there's no fever whatever. It's simply that she doesn't know where she is, nor what has happened, nor who any one is. She doesn't recognize me, nor Mrs. Pearce, nor the major, who's with her now."

"But isn't that what one would rather expect at first, after so sharp an attack?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. The doctor seems very frightened at it."

"What does he say? He surely doesn't think there's any permanent injury to the brain?"

"He won't, or can't, say, exactly. He only says he hopes not; but I can see he's very much alarmed. I'm going up to town to-night by the seven-o'clock; won't you go in this evening and have a talk with him? I think he'll speak more freely to you."

As I left her at the gate she said, nervously, "That horrible man has gone, hasn't he?"

"Yes," I said; "he went up this morning."

She gave me her hand as we parted. "I hope we shall meet again some day under rather happier auspices," she said.

"I hope you'll find your mother better when you arrive."

"Oh, I think it's only a little dodge to get me back to town," she nodded and smiled. "Good-bye."

The days grow even hotter, even yet more brooding and intense. They should be shortening, but one doesn't notice it yet. It is just the time of year when, in the country, there seems nothing doing. The haymaking is over, and the harvest has not yet begun.

With a sort of stupid wonder I read in my *Daily Telegraph* accounts of gay, fashionable doings in London. I cannot conceive how (while Fanny lies all day in her hot, tumbled bed, vacant and talkative, violent even a little at times) people can be dining and dancing. I cannot understand why they allow the university match to be played.

All the doctor said about it was, sadly, "You saw Oxford won?"

"They want us to play for them here on Saturday," he added; "but I can't, I really can't. I haven't the heart, and I don't suppose you have, either."

There's a paragraph every morning of *the extraordinary weather*. I see it's been 89° in the shade in the Strand, and that a great trade is done round Charing Cross and in the city with the sale of Japanese fans. Sunstroke plays like lightning among the troops at Aldershot, and they have their field-days and sham-fights at five in the morning.

For the present the Quaker meeting-house is closed. Mothers prefer to keep their children at home while the great heat lasts. The Redan is more silent and melancholy than ever.

So the days drag on, and Fanny grows no better, no nearer the possession of her wits.

The doctor says if there are not speedy signs of improvement, he will not be responsible for her remaining here. The Warford doctor has been called in, and he is of the same opinion. He thinks, too, her chances of ultimate complete recovery are retarded by her remaining in Thorpe. He speaks of an establishment out in the north of London, where she will be well looked after and properly treated.

The major drags himself about, even yet more careworn and more thin. He cannot bear the idea of a mad-house for his child. Bundy says he doesn't know when he gets any sleep; he came down one morning to find him still sitting, sleepless, in the sitting-room arm-chair.

And now the village seems to stir and heave with the knowledge of something. The gossips are begin-

ning to put two and two together—Banquier's disappearance and the doctor's reticencé, for example; and I'm led to understand Sir Arthur has said something—something disagreeable, of course. Very injudicious of him, it seems to me, if he wants to keep his son to himself and his own plans, that is.

Miss Sophia, too, has spoken to me (fishingly, as lawyers say), and asked what it all means. I could say nothing, except that everything appeared to me the perfectly natural result of the shock. She searched my face speculatively, and appeared annoyed that I could not bring myself to be franker with her.

It was rather strange, by-the-way (though, at the same time, not without its uses), the fashion of the Vegetarian ladies in keeping away from us all till they went up to attend their congress at the Farringdon Hall. I used to see them wandering about, as purely decorative figures as if they had just stepped out of one of Puvis de Chavannes' blank, flat canvases; but they never came near the Redan to inquire after Fanny, and the only time I met them face to face they talked of nothing but the weather, and how cool and pleasant it seemed to them in their rational costume and with their rational diet. Miss Barth's inexpressive countenance was a dull, stewing puce color, and Mrs. Shine was so hot she looked varnished.

I fancy the explanation of such aloofness lay in their deep resentment at not being consulted and employed as nurses, and that they arranged between themselves to ignore everything until we crawled to Laurel Lodge—that shrine of all health and healing

—to implore succor. For they do really regard themselves as the only authorized intermediaries between suffering humanity and *Notre Dame des betteraves*.

I wish I could be on such good terms with myself, so perfectly satisfied with my virtue and way of life; though, to be sure, I never yet met a person of that sort who wasn't an arrant fool. I don't want to be that.

It was towards the end of the second week that Bundy came in one morning, looking rather more lively than usual; he was, in fact, humming the fragment of a hideous little tune.

"Well, Bundy," I said, astonished, "has somebody left you a fortune?"

"No, sir," he replied, with the spectre of a laugh. "The fact is, sir, through the major's kindness I've got a place in Manchester, and if it won't inconvenience you at all, sir, I should like to accept it."

He looked at me apprehensively, as much as to say, "Now, can you get on with that book of yours without me?"

I answered, briskly, "Not the slightest inconvenience. Delighted to hear of your good-fortune; though, of course, I shall miss your help," I added.

Bundy gave a grateful little bow.

"I hope it's a good place?"

"Yes, sir, thank you; sort of copying clerk, I understand. Five-and-twenty shillings a week, and a rise if I make myself useful."

"Not bad! And when do you want to go?"

"Well, sir, they suggest Monday week, the fifteenth, if that will suit you?"

"That will suit me exactly. I'm going up to town for the Eton and Harrow match on the Friday and Saturday, so you'll have two days to yourself to do your packing in."

"Much obliged to you, sir. There's always the danger of a place being filled up if you don't turn up on the exact day they want you."

"No doubt. Well, Bundy, here's your chance. Why, you may rise to be one of the Manchester merchant princes yet, if you're lucky."

The sad, spectral smile appeared again as Bundy seated himself to begin work. His had been a long lane, but there are some whose lives are all lane, whose only turning of luck is down sheer into the death pit. The smile seemed to say, "I know that, you know. There's no such thing as luck in life for me."

For a few moments he leaned back in his chair, looking out of the window, and then, clearing his throat diffidently, he turned towards me.

"There's one thing I should like to ask you, sir, if you don't mind," he said. "You're a lawyer and will know."

"Well, that doesn't necessarily follow."

"I've been thinking about it a good deal lately, sir, and all the more since I've had this offer."

"What is it?"

"Well, sir, it's about my wife."

"You've heard from her?"

"No, sir, no; nor ever likely to. But what I want to know is this: I haven't heard from her for four years—over four years. Am I free to marry again?"

I must say I was a little startled, not to say

shocked, at the question. I had always regarded Mr. Bundy as quite inconsolable, the model of a *de-laissé*; saving up a purse, perhaps, to make his way to Sweden to stand in the hall of the Swedish nobleman's mansion (the count or baron he had heard Flo was married to), sea-worn Enoch Arden and Jean Marie rolled into one. Tenderly reproachful, yet most uncommonly loving and true. And startled domestic servants looking on, over a white pine staircase in becoming dresses—*peasant women from Upsala*—with long ear-rings and gay bodices, and the Swedish nobleman in a tight velvet jacket (whom I pictured a sort of Wilson Barrett) coming out of the sanctum where he reads Swedenborg and Björnson, bearded, smoking a china pipe; making guttural, dissatisfied noises when he discovers his unlawful wife in a dead dramatic faint over against the stove.

Ridiculous, what images fancy fashions; how it jumbles up comedy and tragedy!

"You see, sir," Bundy went on, clearing his throat again, "if I get nicely settled in Manchester and things go well, I shall want some one to look after me. A man's a helpless sort of creature, sir, if he's no one to take care of his money and see after meals for him. But I don't want to get into trouble, sir, or get any one else into trouble either, so I thought I'd just ask you."

I explained the law to Mr. Bundy, as much of it as I rightly knew, and I added, "The important thing is not to deceive the young lady. You must tell her—"

"It won't be a *young* lady, sir," he interrupted, gravely.

"Well, whatever her age, you must tell her at once all about yourself, and make her clearly understand the risk she will run in going through the ceremony with you. Merely because your own wife has committed bigamy won't absolve *you*, you know."

And so on and so on, to all of which Bundy listened with the deepest attention, saying, "Yes, sir. I see, sir. Thank you, sir. That shall be done, sir."

Mr. Bundy's announcement of his new appointment and approaching marriage did much to revive my flagging interest in him; for I confess, to my shame, that latterly he had almost entirely faded out of my sympathies. I had felt that, after all, the ruin of a man's material prosperity was as naught compared to the sorrowful tripping of a virgin. What would have been the complete *krach* of Faust on the Stock Exchange, side by side in intensity with the fall of Marguerite? Why, it's all Lombard Street to that priceless object, a soul.

He was turning to his work when "Dear! dear!" he said, "I'd quite forgotten the major's letter."

He rose and gave it me, while I asked, "Well, I suppose there's no news this morning? Miss Harewood's no better?"

"I didn't hear she was, sir," he answered, as he sat down again.

I had been with the major late the night before, and he had told me it was quite useless to oppose the doctors any longer; that if Fanny were ever permanently to recover she must be taken away. He seemed quite resigned to it; almost relieved she would no longer be so close to him with her poor, senseless chatter.

I found the envelope was addressed by the major, but the letter was written by Fanny herself.

The handwriting was irregular, sometimes large and sometimes small. It began by being written in ink, but towards the end it faded off into almost undecipherable pencil.

It was signed, "Sincerely yours, my dear, your poor Fanny Harewood."

... "Now I want to tell you," the letter began, after a few incoherent phrases about the heat, "how I came to love him so much. The funny thing was I didn't love him at all at first. Wasn't that funny? The night of my new-found happiness the nightingale sang in the lime-tree at the rectory.

"Do you know," it went on, "how *very* tiresome it is always to hear a sewing-machine? At Sydenham my mother used to work one. I used to go and shut the baize door so as not to hear it. When she was ill she gave up working it, and we went down to Hastings. She is buried out at Old Ore, and for a long time I walked about in black. I pitied myself a great deal, and thought people would fancy I was in black because I had lost my lover. Girls think of all sorts of funny things, you know.

"There was a man came into our railway carriage, carrying a pumpkin tied up in a large handkerchief. He made me laugh so by saying, 'This *here* is a pumpkin, and I *grewed* it!'

"My poor hands get so hot, I must just wash them again.

"Do you know, the other day, I forget how long ago, I went into the church and knelt down beside the harmonium and prayed. I got down behind the

harmonium, so that I might not be seen if any one came in. Do you think God saw me? I prayed very hard, but, dear me! it didn't seem to be any use. I prayed because I was beginning to be frightened.

"There goes that horrid baize door banging back, and now I suppose I shall hear the sewing-machine again. I think if I take my rings off I shall write easier.

"Such a lot of funny people come up to see me and look at me in bed, except *him*. Don't you think that unkind? I must say I do. An old man with a long face often comes and shakes his head, and says, '*Oh, Fanny!*' He makes me laugh, and sometimes he frightens me. Once or twice I've caught him crying. I wonder why he cries?

"I am getting so tired of this stupid place, and want to go away to Hastings. We had lodgings there that were so near the sea they used to smell quite salt. Will you ask them for me, *please*, if I may go to Hastings? I should dearly like to see mother's grave, only, please, I don't want to have to wear black. It is so *very* hot, and I am quite warm enough as it is. Do you know, I am always having to wash my hands, they get so frightfully hot.

"I thought I should have died of joy when he said he loved me. He had been so *very* long about it I really thought it was never coming, and used to feel quite *cross*. I had to give him just a little nudge or two, you know, to bring it all out. We poor girls *often* have to, or we get passed over. Men are so silly sometimes.

"I must tell you, there was a girl where I used to

be at school in Paris who used always to make us laugh by saying, '*Oh, la, la!*' Whatever happened she always said, '*Oh, la, la!*' Her name was Sophie. I often say it now, just to amuse myself; you can't think how funny it sounds to say it to yourself: '*Oh, la, la! Oh, la, la!*'

"Do you remember the night it rained so hard and thundered? I pitied myself a great deal that night, listening to the wind and the dripping. The tree outside my window seemed to be whipping the house, to make us take it in out of the wet. I cried so much that night I thought I never should stop.

"I don't think there's anything more I want to say just at present. I hope you will get this letter safely, and come and see me soon."

The tears were running down my face before I had finished; and all the time Bundy kept up his senseless, stale, flat music-hall humming, as though, now he was getting out of his troubles, he didn't care what became of the rest of the world.

CHAPTER XX

THEY TAKE FANNY AWAY—THE MAJOR

So they came and took her away.

The doctor and the major went up with her to town, stayed there the night, and came down again in the morning.

I got as far away from the village that afternoon as I could, and when I came back found she'd gone.

"Miss Harewood has gone, sir," said Mrs. Chick, quietly and sadly, as she cleared away.

"There was no trouble about it, I suppose?"

"Not that I've heard, sir. Poor young lady, I hope we shall soon see her back again, quite recovered and well," she added, with kind cheerfulness.

There is an innate gentility about Mrs. Chick that is quite admirable. All through this most painful time she has carefully refrained from asking any sort of question that might show curiosity. No doubt her training has taught her not to pry into the affairs of the people up-stairs; but whether it be training, or that natural good feeling one finds not uncommonly among the English lower classes, she has given evidence of consideration and reticence that have won her my deepest regard. If she had been a sympathetic duchess she couldn't have behaved more charmingly.

When Bundy came in in the morning I asked him if all had passed off quietly.

He said yes, perfectly quietly. He seemed much struck with the fact (as, indeed, I was too) that the other people in the Redan had kept their blinds down all the afternoon, so as to be above any suspicion of prying.

"Miss Harewood came out on the doctor's arm," he said. "The major followed, carrying a cloak, with his head very much down. Miss Harewood looked quite well, sir—a little thin, perhaps, but otherwise you really wouldn't have known anything was the matter, except for just the quick way she kept moving her head. She just stopped once, opposite me, and pulled the doctor's arm, as if she'd forgotten something and wanted to go back. 'Come on, Fanny,' the doctor said, 'here's the carriage;' and she went on again as quiet as a lamb, without a word."

"Wasn't Mrs. Pearce there?"

"Yes, sir, she was standing at the head of their steps, but she didn't come out."

Mrs. Pearce's behavior all through has been that of the weak and miserable old woman she is—constantly complaining, always frightened, always thinking only of herself and the effect it would all have on her. I saw her once or twice, but I took to hating her so heartily that I found it best to keep entirely out of her way. There is an account yet to be settled between her and the major that, I believe, will cause a good deal of trouble in the addition.

"When does the major get back?" I asked.

"Some time this morning, I think, sir."

After tea the major came in to see me. I clasped his hand, and held it some time to show my sympathy, he looking down, his face working pitifully while he made the effort to be calm and speak.

At last he said, "I thought you'd just like to know."

He sat down, and, after a pause, "The place seems all right" he said. "Now she's gone I'm glad she's there."

"I'm quite sure you've taken the only right course."

"Let's hope so—let's hope so. Bundy tells me you're going up to town on Friday."

"Yes; just till Saturday night."

"You're coming back?" he asked, looking up at me anxiously.

"I won't go if I can do any good staying here with you."

"No, no, not at all. But if you can, if you think you can without neglecting your own business, I should very much wish you to go and see her for me. Will you?" he asked, eagerly.

"Of course I will if you wish it. I'll write you from town all about her on Friday night."

"I shall be very grateful to you," he said. "The doctor—the doctor there doesn't seem to think it a case that presents any difficulties, I'm thankful to say."

"Did he give you any idea of the time the recovery would take?"

"He said he would be able to speak more definitely after some few days' observation; that's why I want you to go and see her. He seems a kind fellow—a kind fellow."

"My God! my God!" he cried, bitterly, putting

his head in his hands and rocking himself backward and forward, "if Grace could only see her child now, what would she have to say to me!—what would she have to say to me!"

"On the other hand, don't you think it's all a great mercy?" I answered, with sincerity. "Depend upon it, Fanny must suffer less now than if she were conscious. It's an anæsthetic; let us rather regard it in that light. Nor will you have half the difficulty, I feel confident, in keeping her away from Banquier that you would have had."

"I don't see how we can tell that," he groaned. "And her future? What is to be her future?"

"No future is ever hopeless, either man's or woman's. You'll find everything, every difficulty, will clear over in time. She will only want care and tenderness and love—an infinity of love."

"That she shall have!" cried the major, with trembling voice, "if a poor, sorrowful, broken old man can give it."

He was silent for some time.

Then he said, in lower tones, "Would you believe it? Last night the doctor and I went out into the Strand to get some dinner at Gatti's restaurant. After dinner, as we were coming back to the hotel, we saw that infernal, that utterly damnable scoundrel, going into the theatre with a party of ladies. If I'd been alone, I swear I believe I should have throttled him on the spot. The doctor caught hold of me just in time, and held me tight by the arm.

"The strange thing was," he added, with mournfulness and something of terror, "the voice I heard, as distinctly as I hear my own."

He said no more, but I knew quite well what he must have been going to say if he had spoken. How the voice had doubtless warned him—

“By what right? Thou thyself so great a sinner!”

How slowly the mills of the gods grind, but—
Heaven’s mercy on us all!—how infinitely fine!

CHAPTER XXI

CANTERBURY HOUSE—POOR FANNY HAREWOOD—ETON
AND HARROW—BANQUIER IN THE PAVILION—BACK
AGAIN TO THE FARM

My Rooms : London.

As I drove from Paddington down the Marylebone Road I kept continually crossing hansoms with small bright Etonians (all broad white collar and tall hat) rolling inside their cabs like loose little kernels in large nuts. Then four-wheelers with footmen and luncheon-baskets, and dark-blue beribboned landaus and barouches that always look as if they must come from Portman Square.

It was a fine bright July day, fresh and clear, and not nearly so hot. People were already beginning to leave town. Driving past Euston and King's Cross, I was stopped by the private omnibuses, crammed with children and governesses and servants.

And I was journeying up to Hoxton to see poor Fanny in the mad-house!

Canterbury House, Hoxton, was once, I imagine, the country residence of some successful merchant of the latter half of the eighteenth century. A couple of stucco eagles with staring glass eyes guard its high and sombre gates that open off the high pavement, inward, on to an iron portico leading to the square dark-brick house that stands in its own grounds.

The man-servant locked the gates and doors behind me. He led me into a reception-room at the back looking into the large garden, and left me to take my card in to the doctor.

The room was gray and cold, ill-furnished, evidently never sat in. There were a few prints of Eastlake and Charles Landseer, "Charles I. at Lytham House," Italian peasant scenes of the stereotyped class; the ornaments on the mantel-piece—in a word, the whole aspect of the room pointing to the most dismal period of our domestic ugliness, from '40 to '70.

The doctor came in, holding my card. He looked me over with a somewhat false air of important scrutiny. He was a little man of eight-and-forty, nearly bald, with mustache and whiskers. If I had met him elsewhere I should have taken him for an undistinguished government official, or a possible West-end wine-merchant.

He got me into the light, and watched me closely while I explained. Oh, I was not a relative? A friend; oh yes, to be sure. Her father wished me to call, and Dr. Martin. Who was Dr. Martin? The Thorpe practitioner. Oh yes; it was perhaps a pity Dr. Martin had not furnished me with a letter. Then he looked at me, waiting for more.

I ventured to hope Miss Harewood was going on well? Perfectly well, he said, shortly and resentfully. And would completely recover? No doubt; a mere temporary derangement. A person's head, I went on to suppose, might get out of order like a person's stomach, and be just as sound, possibly sounder, after recovery? No doubt, no doubt, he

replied, indulgently, slightly smiling. Would I excuse him? he would just see one of his assistants.

A rather sour, suspicious little man; not unkind, I dare say, but obstinate, important to a degree.

I stood looking out into the wide garden. The sunlight in it seemed faded. At the side I had glimpses of high walls. On a seat away to the left, under some large, full bushes, a poor wretch was sitting crumpled up like an old empty glove. His keeper lounged against a tree close by, smoking and reading the paper.

The doctor came back and said Miss Harewood would be sent for. I observed it was a fine day, fortunately, for the cricket-match. What cricket-match was that? Eton and Harrow? Oh yes, to be sure. No, the doctor had no time to go to Lords'; he hadn't seen a cricket-match since he was a boy.

There was a rustle outside the door, a little stifled laughter, and poor Fanny came in, followed by the assistant.

She seemed as blithe and bonny as a bird; with a curious half-gliding, half-dancing movement she came straight towards the window. Then she stopped and looked hard at me. How bright her eye was, of a loose, floating, moist kind of brightness, and, poor soul, how vacant!

She bowed her head in my direction, then nodded it slowly once or twice.

"Is that the poet?" she asked the assistant.

Without waiting for an answer she sat down with her hands in her lap, between her knees, and rubbing the palms slowly together looked out into the garden.

The doctor introduced me, and saying, shortly, "Good-morning," walked out of the room.

The assistant was an elderly man, between fifty and sixty, of a kindly, jovial, half-naval aspect.

"She won't know me, I suppose?" I whispered.

"Fanny," said the assistant, "don't you know this gentleman? He's a friend of yours. Fanny!"

She turned her head quickly, with a bird-like movement, and looked at me suspiciously. She shook her head, and, saying "No, I don't know you," looked out again into the garden.

I came and stood by her chair. "Fanny," I said, gently, "your father sends you his love. Fanny, don't you hear me?"

She paid not the slightest attention, but kept eagerly looking out of the window, as though something were attracting her attention.

"Fanny," said the assistant, kindly, "you must listen to this gentleman."

Fanny turned her head with the same quick gesture. "What does he say? Why does he come here talking?" she asked, irritably.

"Because he knows you've been ill. He wants to tell your father he's seen you, and that you're much better."

"Have I been ill?" Fanny asked, looking troubled and scared.

"Oh, everybody's ill at times; but you're much better now, aren't you?"

"Much better!" cried Fanny, with a scornful peal of laughter.

She got up and stood against the window, resting her forehead against the pane. I noticed that

her little nails had grown, that she no longer bit them.

Then she said, angrily, without turning her head, "You're talking the greatest nonsense; my father's been dead years and years."

"Is her memory quite gone?" I asked.

The assistant nodded.

"Fanny," he said, slowly and distinctly, "do you think you can tell this gentleman what you had for dinner to-day?"

She turned her light, restless face towards him. She shook her head. Then, "What did I have for dinner to-day?" she asked, imploringly; "do tell me."

"Don't you remember? Try."

She shook her head quickly and muttered something rapid.

"You had leg of mutton and some very good milk pudding. Don't you remember?"

Fanny laughed and turned away from the window. "I had leg of milk pudding," she said, laughing violently.

Suddenly she looked at me as if she saw me for the first time. Her face clouded, she looked angry and defiant. "I don't like this man," she pouted.

"Oh, Fanny!"

"I want to go up-stairs, please. I don't like this room." She came to him, rubbing her hands together.

"I'll take you in one minute," said the assistant.

"I want to go up-stairs."

"Be patient."

"I'm very patient," Fanny moaned.

The assistant rang the bell. "Do you want to see me again when I come down?" he asked.

"No, thank you, I needn't trouble you further. How long will this recovery take?"

"Oh, a few weeks; perhaps six."

"And her memory?"

"Oh, that 'll be all right."

The servant entered, and Fanny stopped moaning. She began to laugh again, going with the same half-dancing motion towards the open door.

"Fanny!" cried the assistant. She stopped and turned to him.

"Come and say good-bye to this gentleman," he said, kindly. "Thank him for coming to see you."

She came to me obediently and quickly, and gave me her hot, slim hand.

"Good-bye," she said, searching my face with her wide, moist eyes.

"Good-bye, Fanny," I said, holding her hand. "Shall I give your father any message?"

She shook her head doubtfully, and looked at the assistant.

"Send him your love," he said.

"My love," echoed Fanny in a low voice, looking troubled and disengaging her hand.

She waited obediently while the assistant shook hands with me.

"I dare say you're going up to the match," he said. "I shall look in if I can about five. I'm an old Harrow man."

"I want to go up-stairs," the girl moaned.

"Oh, in Vaughan's time, years and years ago. Come, Fanny."

Fanny walked by his side, looking imploringly up in his face.

"We're going up-stairs, aren't we?" she asked.

"Yes, yes," said the assistant, indulgently, "only don't you go too fast. I'm an old gentleman, you know."

She laughed gayly, and, slipping her arm through his, they left the room together.

As I got into my cab I heard the gates being locked behind me. The cabman was surprised to see me come out so soon—I had hardly been a quarter of an hour in the house; he had been feeding his horse.

Saturday Night.

Here I am, back again on the farm. I came down after the match, and didn't get in till past nine.

After my interview with Fanny I drove straight to Lords'. I was making my way to the pavilion, through the sauntering, chattering crowds, when my name was called from the back of the members' seats, Block D.

It was Lady Gideon, sitting in the last row, with her back to the cricket and her usual two or three pretty girls and nice-looking, clean young men. I sat with her the rest of the afternoon, and went across with them to one of the tents for tea.

Oh, the sad contrast between all that gayety and the blank, melancholy Hoxton mad-house!

I felt dazed among the talk and laughter, the clatter of spoons, the roar of cheers, the shrill cries of "Fielded, sir!" and "Bowled!"—and yet I managed to chatter away like the rest, and make the pretty girl next to me laugh.

How many men there must be who (as I felt myself) feel themselves parted from the old gay social

life, which yet they contrive to mingle with and enjoy (as I did), almost in spite of themselves.

I remember meeting a man at dinner a few months back, an ordinary diner-out apparently; if, indeed, any man is ordinary.

We grew confidential after dinner, and he told me that, ten years ago, a love of acting and want of money had sent him on the stage, one of the earliest of the well-born amateurs.

He travelled over England with a country company, then went with another to America. The company broke up, and he was left stranded out West. He turned to this and that for a living, succeeded but indifferently, and finally joined a settlement out in the backwoods, founded in connection with his old school at home; which settlement one remembers hearing of failing disastrously.

After many privations, real privations, he managed to make his way back to England. The very night he arrived he went to dine at his old club, and there he found a card for a dance, his name still lingering on some one's old ball-list. And at the dance (as he said) he found many of the old girls, his former partners, making the old eyes, dancing the old steps, talking the old, old slip-slop. They were all glad to see him, and all fancied it was only a day or two since that they had seen him in the Row; last season, at the latest, that they had danced with him.

He didn't tell them it was ten years; he didn't tell them all he had gone through since then. I dare say they had gone through something too.

For is anything in the world sadder in its way than the old girls, with their thin necks and haggard

faces, one sees at every London dance, lingering on despairingly? They smile and talk agreeably enough; not often does their bitterness break out; and yet what savage passions of rage and disappointment, and baffled settlement in life, must be tearing at those poor hungry hearts!

I always think it is so much to their credit that they don't combine to tear to pieces the fresh young débutantes who carry off their old partners—as often as not marry them.

It's one of the triumphs of our civilization that—cat meeting dog and not flying at each other's throat; even being very tolerably polite.

I went up to Lords' again early this morning and made my way to the top of the pavilion. I hadn't been there ten minutes, sitting among old friends, before Banquier came up. He was well dressed in dark gray, with *peau-de-suède* gloves, white spats, and varnished boots. I didn't see him until he leaned over and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Well," he whispered, "when did you come up?"

"I came up yesterday."

"Going back again?"

"This afternoon, some time."

I rose and moved down to the end of the front row, where no one was sitting, and where Banquier joined me. We leaned over the rail for some little time in silence, and looked down on the cheerful toy scene of green grass and moving white figures, and the large broken ring of gay folk gradually filling the members' seats. The coaches and carriages shone glossy in their half-emptiness, the flag by the public-

house streamed merrily in the brisk upper air, the clock over the tennis-court pointed to half - past eleven.

"You haven't been up there, I suppose, by any chance?" he asked at last.

I had written him a line from Thorpe telling him of poor Fanny's removal, and now I told him of my visit and its result.

"Will she go back to Thorpe?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I imagine not."

There was a long pause, and then he said, half to himself, "I shall try and persuade her to come, you know."

"With you? Where?"

"Somewhere abroad. Brittany for choice. It's the only possible chance of happiness for either of us. Don't you think so?"

"Don't you think you've caused unhappiness enough, without making it practically life-long?"

"I only want to do what I conceive to be right under the circumstances. What else have you to advise?"

"Leave us all alone for a time; don't make the slightest sign even of your existence. If I find you're really wanted I'll communicate with you."

He turned his back on the cricket, and, looking down admiringly at his boot, tapped it with his stick.

"It's a fortunate thing I'm fairly well off," he said, complacently; "we shall always be comfortable, at any rate."

"You don't appear to give much thought to the major."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Won't it be just the same as if we were married? He would have had to part with her then. After all, you must do the best you can in life with your material. We shall not be able to build a patent, blame-proof mansion of respectability, but it will shelter us, and I believe we shall be happy."

"What will your own people say?"

He smiled a little. "That it's very sad; that I might have done anything—all the commonplaces. Then they'll begin to forget me. 'Is he still living in Brittany with that woman? I suppose he means to marry her if his wife dies. Well, I only hope he won't want to bring her here, that's all.' And the rest of it."

Shrill cheers and cries from the cricket, the hollow rap of sticks from the pavilion.

"Hullo! all out?" said Banquier. "Well, I shall see you again, I dare say." And he climbed away clumsily, and left me to rejoin my old school-friends.

They were standing up stretching themselves, looking down on the swarming ground, the white figures making their way back to the pavilion.

My old school-friends, to whom I was bound by all those subtle ties life never can create but once!

Penderton—a huge, simple creature in the Guards, with fresh, pink face and immaculate frock-coat; inquisitive, deeply religious, solid, honorable, and dull. Vivid little *Whitgift*, clean shaved, amateur-acting member of Lloyd's, always flying over the country to act in charities and sing Chevalier's songs (better than Chevalier, of course), always in travail with a first piece for the theatre, or an adaptation from the French; never so really happy as when the cabmen

mistake him for Arthur Roberts. *Harley*—prematurely bald, county councillor in remote Shropshire, who hunts all the winter, plays cricket all the summer, and fishes in Scotland between whiles; sensitive, humorous, sincere, tender-hearted. *Francis*—old school poet and Newdigate prizeman, early married, and always girding at the institution in consequence; producing every two years (at his own expense) chaste little verse volumes of *Gleanings*, or *Driftings*, or *Soul Communings*, which he always sends us and we none of us read. *Middleton*—the wicket-keep of my time, with his boyish, honest laugh and occasional scandalous stories, purposely to embarrass *Penderton* and call up the guardsman's blush. *Duff*—the famous cover-point and schoolmaster, beloved of small boys, silent and gentle from the approaching bliss of a long-deferred marriage.

How wholesome it seemed to join them again after Banquier; it was like stepping out of the hot-room of the Turkish bath into the summer air of St. James's Street.

"Who's your mysterious friend in gray?" cried Whitgift. "He's got some hold on you, evidently, by the meek way you went after him."

"He's the decoy for a money-lender in Jermyn Street," said Francis, who prides himself on always being able to place people. "You'll find you'll all have circulars when you get home."

Later in the afternoon, just as I was leaving, I had another final glimpse of Banquier. He was sitting on the box-seat of a carriage, talking and laughing

with a pretty girl in the Eton colors. They were eating strawberries and cream together, very merry and confidential.

And then the roar and rattle of Lords' died away as I drove down across quiet, decorous Maida Vale to catch my last train for Warford from Paddington.

CHAPTER XXII

THORPE CHURCH—THE EMPTY VILLAGE—TOMMY AND THE MAJOR

I, too, went to church, in answer to the bells' plaintive appeal; for the first time since I've been here, I'm ashamed to say.

As I knelt by the major, who gave me one keen look as I came in, and then immediately resumed his book, my heart gave sharp throbs and beats of pity as I thought of poor Fanny kneeling behind the harmonium in her desolate anguish, clasping her hot hands, trying to pray; and now away in Hoxton, where the sun seems misty.

Here, in this ancient country church, full of queer rustic noises and scents, the windows open, the brisk birds outside chittering in the ivy; here, in the few weeks I had been in Thorpe, two poor souls had turned in their trouble to the God who loves us, ever loves us, even when we seem furthest from Him; parted though we be, by a gulf dug by ourselves, in our folly and self-sufficiency.

How many more, in the long, long years since first the pious Norman traced the building, must have so knelt, blind and wavering, dimly feeling for the Presence that only can strengthen and console!

Down the broad tide of time—in the early French

wars, the Wars of the Roses, the civil troubles—wives of the bowmen, sweethearts of the pikemen of Naseby, down to lovers of Brown Bess of the Peninsula, of muskets of the Crimea, rifles of India, how many must have sobbed here, at the foot of the Cross (for is not Calvary in every church?), their sorrows of parting, their prayers for safe return, their terrors of death to the dear ones by bullet and disease! And those more intimate griefs of deception, part of all village life—poor, weeping, lost Blowsabellas, with all their bitter troubles ahead!—oh, the times and times they must have knelt in these rough old pews, scarlet with their coming shame, pallid with present apprehensions!

I thought of the entry Mr. Kearsley once showed me in the church register, dated 1785—so late as that!—when one Jane Port was adjudged by the rector of that day to do penance at the altar-rails in a white sheet and holding a candle—penance as Jane Shore did it, and for the same offence.

Poor dear Jane Port! I hope it was the turning-point in your life.

What an outbreak there would be if some high-church curate were so to adjudicate to-day! Conceive how *Truth* would scream and the *Daily Chronicle* yelp.

All through the drowsy service, alternately droned and gabbled through by Mr. Kearsley (if only the clergy would take a few lessons in elocution, even from a bad actor!), with Miss Sophia surveying us masterfully, with a look of Catherine of Russia, from the harmonium, my thoughts ran fast and troubled on Fanny.

The mercy of her present madness I could plainly see, but her future, when her mind returned? What could the major's action be—what should it be? Would Banquier persist? Would she insist on joining him, or would this sad interval of insanity clear her eyesight, have the effect of curing her infatuation?

Women are often enough cured of their infatuations—by trivialities, too. I thought with a smile of that odd little scene in "*L'Ami des Femmes*," when the hero persuades the young man to shave, and the girl who loves him sees for the first time his ridiculous runaway chin. She sees it, and she goes out laughing, away down through the garden, heart-free. You hear her laughing outside, a little at herself, half bitterly, for her folly.

"*C'est l'amour qui s'envole !*" says the hero, listening, delighted with the success of his little ruse.

Was Fanny's passion curable, or would it be of the more ingrained, rare type that maims and one day kills? Time, time alone can tell.

Not far from me sat Sir Arthur and his soldier son, looking amazingly handsome. Sir Arthur seemed on guard over him, half triumphantly, as much as to say, "Ah! the boy's safe now; no foolish marriage for him now with your trumpety Fanny. Good lad! he's going back to Sheffield to take up with a boiler-ess. We'll find ourselves back in Worcestershire yet. The old family will get on its legs again, in spite of you and your confounded love-matches!"

And John sat there enigmatic, with his crisp, curling black hair on his well-shaped head and his really beautiful profile. Impossible to guess at what he

was thinking of ; whether he has any plans, or the will to carry them through if he has. I haven't exchanged a word with him for a week, and I hear he is leaving Thorpe to-morrow. Time alone can show us what he means to do.

On this sunny summer morning all Thorpe was at church. What they expected I don't know, but they were evidently all agape for something. I think, perhaps, they looked for pulpit references to our late troubles, but if so they were disappointed, for Mr. Kearsley preached one of those sort of sermons I always think of as written in two syllables, entirely meaningless and useless to any living soul.

How much the Church of England would gain in usefulness and power if we had a preaching order—if not all our clergy were allowed up in the pulpit.

It was Communion Sunday, but I did not stay. As I was going the major whispered me to come in to tea ; Tom was coming. He made no reference to Fanny ; I had written him from town very fully about her. I nodded to him, and got out as quickly as I could, through the church-yard, down to the quiet, lilled patch of water by the mill.

I watched it creeping round the bend, so stealthily and still.

“At any rate,” I thought, “my sister, we have saved you from that !”

Monday Afternoon.

I can't bear the village any longer ; it's too void, and yet too full of shadows. Shadows, like Ossian's, that sit and wring their wreathed hands by lane and water-side, stalk moaning or glide with vacant laughter through the quiet, sunny Redan.

I'll go away abroad. I'll go straight to Chur, and see if that angry little river that brawls past the "Steinbock"—so clear and rushing, it sounds as if it were cascading down the passages and staircases—can cleanse my mind of some of all this haunting sorrow. I'll clamber upon the torpid *diligence* and lurch down over the Albula, past those gorgeous Salvator Rosa views, down among the quicksilver lakes of Silvaplana, up the green Engadine valley to Saratz's house—that good, fat ex-chamois-hunter—at Pontresina.

I'll—but, oh! I'm a lonely man, a very, very lonely man, wherever I go, under whatever sky I take refuge!

Every one's gone, or going, from Thorpe. Bundy came to say good-bye, with a large bunch of cottage flowers wrapped up in an old newspaper. He's promised to write from Manchester and tell me how he gets on.

Mrs. Pearce has flown to a boarding-house in Upper Baker Street to set them all by the ears. I hear she had a violent scene with the major before she left. She told him she hoped never to see Fanny again, that the poor girl was wicked and ungrateful—all the bitter words one uses when one knows one is in the wrong (how I hate getting entangled with ones!) and is afraid of being attacked first. Let her go—worthless, vain, empty old woman!

Miss Sophia goes to-morrow to town, *en route* for Aix-les-Bains. She has made the major promise to bring Fanny abroad and join her there as soon as she's well enough to travel. She tells me, rather pompously, perhaps, as much as to say, "What a noble sight is an irreproachable woman doing her

duty! Observe the conduct of a sister of a Church of England clergyman!"—she tells me she means to adopt Fanny, and leave her all her money, as her mother's oldest friend.

Somehow—Heaven forgive me if I'm unjust!—I have the instinct her enthusiasm will gradually dwindle, that cautious worldliness will ultimately dwarf her present resolves, that "all my money" will collapse to a twenty-pound legacy.

Only the Carltons are soon coming back, to live happily together as before; and no heart in Thorpe, I know, will be so deeply wrung as that gentle woman's, who would so truly have been poor Fanny's friend if only she had let her.

Immovable, inscrutable, sits old Mrs. Martin in her garden-chair when I go to see her and tell her how soon I am going away. She refers to Fanny as "that unfortunate girl," and says no doubt all will come all right, if only we don't all fuss and interfere too much to begin with. In the manner of old people, she doesn't seem to show much feeling over it; she has a vista of her own that now, no doubt, begins to claim all her attention, the vista that must soon branch out from the garden-path of Thorpe into eternity.

When I tell her I hope to come down another year, to find her still well and strong, she answers, with humorous gruffness, "Lord! I hope not. We old women are noosances enough as it is, without living forever."

The Redan is still the same, still as slumberous and as sunny. I went to tea there yesterday, to the major's. Bundy was up-stairs, understood to be

packing, though what he can have to pack I can't conceive. Tommy was at the tea-table when I got there, bright and sharp as a new pin.

He jumped up with "Here you are! I brought 'Arnold' with me on spec. I'm in those fearful conditional sentences, and unless you do 'em for me I shall go cracked."

"Latin prose on Sunday, Tommy? It's against my principles."

"Oh, all rot, your principles!" chuckled the candid Tommy, beating me with his small brown fist. "Come on, old chap; here's one for you: 'The general declared that if the reinforcements did not come up, it would be all over with the army.' Did you ever hear such utter bosh! Now, fire away; you dictate and I'll write. That's fair, ain't it?"

The major's tea was untasted, his face was wan and pinched, his poor, wrinkled old eyes were continually filling with tears. He blew his nose constantly. "The governor's got awful hay-fever," said Tommy.

So I dictated Tommy's Latin prose, and asked him between whiles after Dunch and other friends.

"Old Dunch's latest game is boot-blackening and a magazine," Tommy confided. "Our boots are so shockingly badly done, he does 'em all over again for us at tuppence a pair. He made seven and tenpence last week, and says he wants to save up the money to buy his mother a bicycle. All gammon, you know, because his mother's twenty stone, at least. I've seen her. So we're going to make him stand us a supper with it the last night of the term. '*Acturum esse de exercitu*'—that all right?"

"That 'll do. And what about the magazine?"

"We call it the *Heath Hill Miscellany*," said Tommy, with a rush at the miscellany. "Dunch has got a story running through called 'Sport and Adventure among the Matabeles.'"

"Plenty of poetry, I suppose?"

"Fillmer does the poetry. Rather rot, I must say; all about his little sister who died, and the cuckoo."

"And what do you do?"

"I do the society gossip," said Tommy, importantly. "Scandal about our beaks; *on dits*; where they're going to spend their holidays, and 'We noticed that Mr. Williams smelt strongly of tobacco last fourth school on Wednesday. Surely this gentleman had not been smoking?' That sort of thing, you know."

"You invent it, I suppose?"

"Most of it," laughed Tommy. "This week we're going to have a paragraph in about poor Miss Harewood: 'The sad and mysterious illness that has suddenly smitten—'"

The major rose and left the room, saying, hurriedly, "I'll be back directly."

Tommy was silent, and looked at me rather scared.

"I say, do you know what's wrong with the governor?" he asked. "He's been awfully queer lately. I don't half like it."

"I think," I said, slowly, "he's taken a great liking to Miss Harewood, and feels her illness very much. If I were you, Tommy, I should go up to him, if he doesn't come down again soon, and try and tell him how sorry you are, and how fond you are of him. You *are* very fond of him, aren't you?"

"Why, of course," said Tommy, his lip trembling.

"He's the best old chap that ever lived, that's all. I'll go now."

"Give him a few minutes more. And tell me, Tommy, if your father decides to stay on in Thorpe through August, do you think you'll very much mind?"

"Oh, not go to the sea-side!" he said, looking distressed.

"I dare say, perhaps, he may wish to stay on here or in London till Miss Harewood gets quite well again. Now, if he does, how would you like to come abroad with me for a few weeks? Don't you think we might have some fun? Then we could all meet somewhere afterwards and come home together."

Tommy's unhappy face cleared at once.

"That would be ripping! if you think the governor would let me go. But I don't like leaving him, if he's in any trouble. Will you ask?"

"I'll ask. Don't you say anything about it just yet."

Tommy stood listening.

Then he said: "I think I'd like to go up-stairs and see him now, if you don't think he'd mind."

"Well, go quietly. And if he doesn't want to be disturbed, come down again at once."

I heard the boy's steps as he went up the stairs of the quiet little house; the pause on the landing, the knock on the door, the major's muffled voice, then the steps in the major's room overhead.

Silence, soft and loving, seemed to fall over me, wrapped by unseen hands. From one of the neighbor's houses in the Redan I heard the slow, laborious playing of a hymn.

The Gentleman in Search of Quiet seemed almost to have found it at last.

EPILOGUE

AUTUMN

Thorpe Green.

ONCE more the Redan. *Post multa sæcula*, as time appears since last I sat there.

From the great elm overhead the leaves are falling lingeringly, snapped by unseen fingers from the bough, wafted with a not ungrateful courtesy for their release on to the seat and the hard, dry ground. The tree is full of busy autumn spirits, putting branch and twig in order for the winter.

The leaf that settles on my shoulder is dry and crisp and dead.

Can it be the same whose birth I witnessed—in *tiny sheaf*—so many months ago, in May? the same leaf through whose green June transparency the tempered sunlight beat all those long midsummer heats; the same that heard my night talk with Fanny; that saw the major strike her lover; that turned in the soft July breeze to watch her go on the doctor's arm; that guessed she went to London and the mad-house?

Can it really be the same?

The dead leaf seems, as I hold it, suddenly to grow vital, suddenly to have found a small, hoarse voice—all that is left of the tender, rustling accents of summer.

"Yes, it is the same," croaks the leaf. "Tell me about her. I have so often thought of her, so often wondered. See! her house is empty; there's a bill in the dirty window, another in the major's. No one comes into the Redan now; I haven't heard her name here these months past. Tell me what you know. Hold me in your hand and talk to me. Then you can drop me, and Ben will sweep me with my fellows into a dusty heap, and clap me up with boards, and wheel me out on to the Green, and burn me, and I shall be no more—till next year! Come, friend, talk to me!"

And the leaf seemed to give my palm a small, imperious push.

"Good master leaf!—"

"Nay," cries the leaf, "no phrases! just be friendly. And if you want to please me, and make my dying easy, why, you can skip your travels, your foreign parts, with Tommy. I can't abide your travellers' tales and descriptions; they mean nothing to me. I have lived and died in the Redan these hundred and fifty years; England and the Redan are good enough for me. Besides, I only want to hear about Fanny. Once my shadow rested on her cheek, and I thought I should have died, before my time, of joy!"

"Dear friendly leaf, I'll talk to you with pleasure, for there doesn't seem a soul in the place this fine October day for me to turn to, to talk with freely heart to heart.

"But it's lonely work, leaf, isn't it, for a grown man to have only a shrivelled piece of elm—*Ulmus campestris*, the mere Warwickshire weed—left to exchange confidences with?"

The dry old stick of a leaf sighs sympathetically, and touches with a caress the heart line in my open palm.

Paris in September. It's the third week of the month, and Tommy and I have come back from our Swiss travels—of which you don't want to hear anything?—*Not a word!*—have come back to meet the major and Fanny at the Hôtel de France et Choiseul, in the Rue St. Honoré.

Fanny's recovery was speedier than they looked for. She left Canterbury House on the 16th of August, and, after a few days at Folkestone with the major, they went straight abroad to Aix, in Savoy.

There they remained a fortnight. Miss Kearsley was there, very tolerably thoughtful and kind. She knew a good many people, and wanted to introduce Fanny to her friends, but the major wouldn't hear of it; his daughter's health was still so uncertain, he said. So father and daughter strolled about together arm in arm and sipped the waters, watched the gambling, and listened to the music, while every day Fanny grew brighter and stronger.

She never mentioned Banquier's name the whole time, never wondered (at any rate, out loud) why he didn't write. All the time they were at Aix she never even spoke of Thorpe, or anybody in it; except once, to ask abruptly when Miss Ryle was going to be married. Miss Sophia said some time in the middle of September, she believed—"So they were," said the leaf, "I heard the bells. They're still away, honeymooning"—and Fanny asked if Miss Sophia thought she might send a wedding-present.

"Why, of course!" said Miss Sophia, "she'll be delighted."

"I didn't know," Fanny murmured, "whether, perhaps, they mightn't want to send it back."

Poor, humble, sorrowful girl!

From Aix, at the beginning of September, they went to Geneva. There I wrote to the major from Pontresina, offering to come and join them and travel all together to Paris; but the major answered he thought it best that Fanny and he should be alone as much as possible before we met for a day or two, when Tommy passed through Paris with me on his way back to school.

He was still calling himself Major Ross, he wrote, and he didn't want Tommy to learn the relationship till later in the year, when Fanny's future would, he hoped, be more clearly settled. He told me he had heard frequently from Captain Poynder, and thought it not unlikely they might one day soon meet; as to the judiciousness of allowing which, he desired first to consult with me.

Paris in September, as bright as spring. Tommy and I had a couple of days there alone before the major and Fanny came. We used to go to the Porte Maillot and hire bicycles, and ride about in the Bois and out to the fair at St. Cloud; it was better fun than sight-seeing, Tommy thought. The weather was superb; it has been a veritable *annus mirabilis* for weather, and two or three of the chestnuts in the Champs-Élysées were in full bloom as though it were once more May.

The place was very full, mostly of English and

Americans. Tommy made friends with an American boy in the hotel, and made himself sick with some horrible-delightful candy from Fuller's, in the Avenue de l'Opéra. The boy's mother was out all day getting her hats and dresses for the New York season, and never got back to the hotel except just in time to overdress herself for dinner. Master Everard C. Chivers spent his day in the hotel riding up and down in the lift, and making it reek of wintergreen lozenges.

On the 19th Fanny and the major arrived. We found them standing in the court-yard, watching the luggage brought in, when we got back from St. Cloud. Fanny looked a little tired and saddened, but very pretty and well; she came forward at once and shook hands with me and kissed Tommy. Tommy had clips on his trousers for riding, and they set off talking about bicycles.

Soon after dinner she went away to bed, and the major and I were left alone. He had been cramped up all day in the train, and suggested we should go out and take a stroll. We went up the quiet Rue de la Paix, out into the less frequented side of the Boulevards, and walked as far as the Porte St. Denis.

The major asked after Tommy, how he had been, and whether he had given any trouble; and then he said he had found a letter from Captain Poynder on his arrival, suggesting he should come over to Paris the following week, meet them as though by accident, and go about with them for some few days. What did I think?

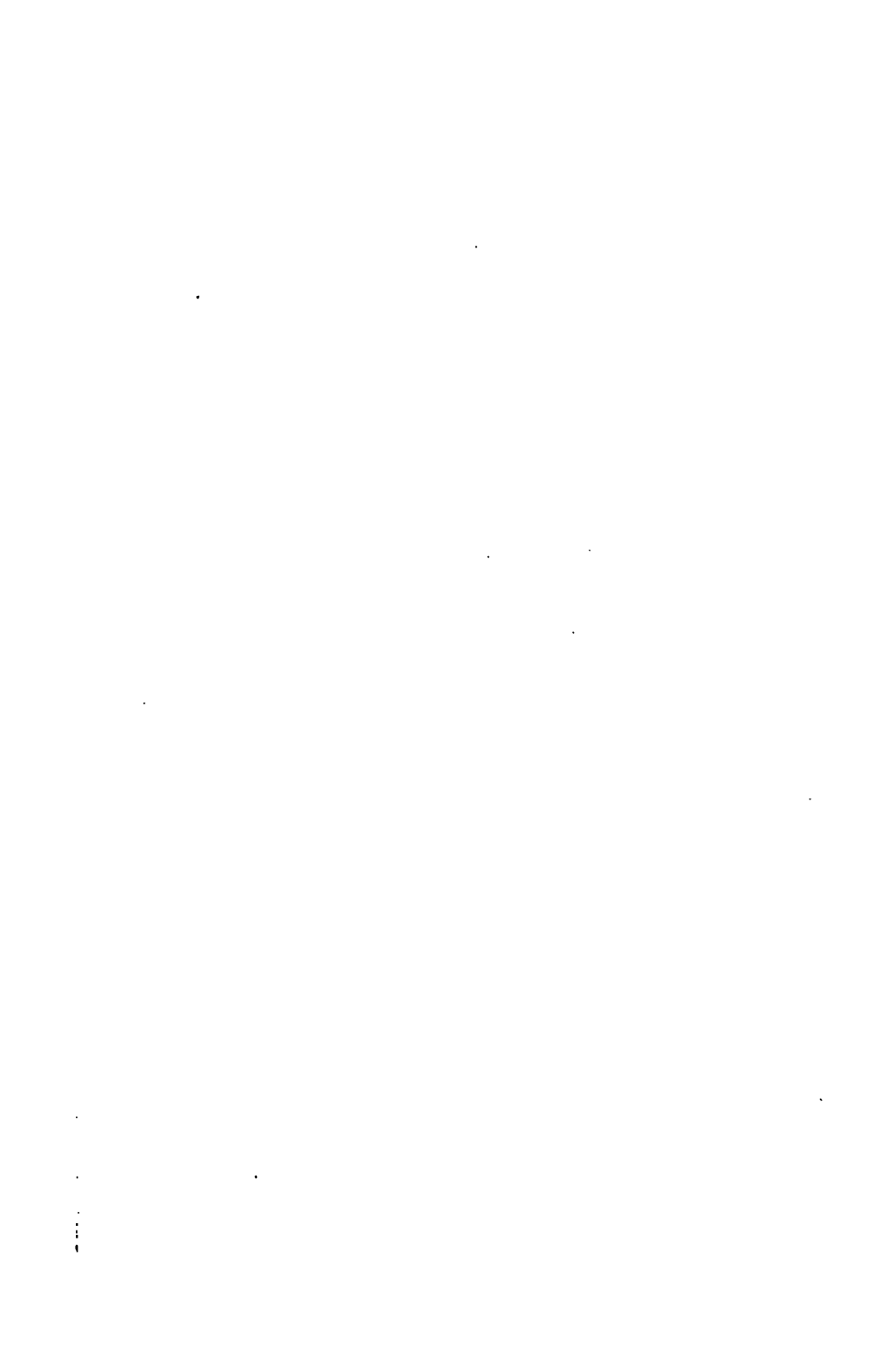
I thought it was clearly too soon. . . .

NOTE.—I never wrote any more in my journal. By a strange coincidence, however, a friend who had carried the copy-books off with him to read sent me only the other day the following cutting from the *Times*, which I had missed seeing, and which ends it all better than I could ever have done :

“On the 25th June, 1895, at St. Margaret’s, Wells Street, Sir John Poynder, Bart., Captain in the West Staffordshire Regiment, to Fanny, daughter of Major Harewood, late of the Royal Artillery.”

My friend had added in pencil, “I can’t make up my mind whether the fellow’s done a deuced fine thing, or whether he’s a bit of a fool !”

THE END



**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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